

Gardner-Webb University Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University

Divinity Projects


School of Divinity

2010

A study of compassion: Aaron's Creek Baptist Church in Virgilina, Virginia reaching single parent families

Billy Ray McEntire
Gardner-Webb University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/divinity_etd

 Part of the [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McEntire, Billy Ray, "A study of compassion: Aaron's Creek Baptist Church in Virgilina, Virginia reaching single parent families" (2010). *Divinity Projects*. Paper 16.

This Project is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Divinity at Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Divinity Projects by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@gardner-webb.edu.

A STUDY OF COMPASSION: AARON'S CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH IN
VIRGINIA, VIRGINIA REACHING SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF THE M. CHRISTOPHER WHITE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY
BOILING SPRINGS, NORTH CAROLINA

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
BILLY RAY M^CENTIRE

MAY 17, 2010

APPROVAL FORM

A STUDY OF COMPASSION: AARON'S CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH REACHING

SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES

BILLY RAY MCENTIRE

Approved by:

_____ (Faculty Advisor)

_____ (Field Supervisor)

_____ (D. Min. Director)

Date: _____

Copyright © 2010 by Billy Ray McEntire
All rights reserved.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am an abundantly blessed man. I am thankful to God for allowing me to take three years of my life to discover a deeper ministry opportunity. I am eternally grateful to God for making me what I am today. All that I am and ever hope to be is a direct result of God's matchless grace in my life. Today, my dream has become a reality.

Three years ago when I enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program at Gardner-Webb University, I was apprehensive. After speaking with Dr. Danny West, the Director of the D. Min. program, I became convinced that I could do this work. Dr. West offered much encouragement and insight in my work and challenged me when I was discouraged. I will always be grateful for his academic steadfast instruction as I continued toward the end of my project work.

I want to thank my field supervisor Dr. Kenneth Massey, pastor of First Baptist Church at Greensboro, North Carolina. His instruction and ability to push me to probe deep into myself has helped me tremendously with this project. His direction and foresight has been an asset throughout this ministry project. Interactions between me and the other students were great learning experiences. Theological discussion has come to mean more to me than ever.

I also want to thank Dr. Cal Robertson, my academic supervisor, for his red ink pen. Many times, repeatedly, he offered valuable and thoughtful insight for me. I am grateful for his fresh approach to instruction and his ability to lead me to express my

inner thoughts as I continued in this project. I value Dr. Robertson's quest for perfection. It has been a deep joy working with him, and his integrity and character are impeccable.

I am blessed through Aaron's Creek Baptist Church of Virgilina, Virginia for its members' support, prayers, and encouragement through this doctoral program. I am thankful for my lay proof-readers Betty Wells and Donna Hallberg for their constructive critical suggestions.

I want to thank a very special friend who has encouraged, challenged, and inspired me to put my thoughts on paper. I would not have been able to write and rewrite this paper countless times. I will always be grateful to my editor, Debora McNichol. Debora has been patient and had countless suggestions for improving the content of this paper.

Many thanks and appreciation goes to the ministry team that helped make this project a wonderful success. Thanks to those who cooked and served many special goodies throughout the course of these three years for others and me. Special thanks go to my mother-in law Phyllis Powell and my mother Sara McEntire, who believed in me when I did not, and for their unwavering encouragement.

I am especially blessed and thankful for my wife Wanda, my best friend, confidant, and prayer warrior in ministry. Without her, I could not have forged ahead with this project. I thank her for her unending love, encouragement, and support when I felt like throwing in the towel. This project belongs to both of us. Thank you, Wanda, for being you and allowing me to be me.

ABSTRACT

Christ's mandate requires the Church to minister to those in physical and spiritual need (Matt 25:31-46). This project ministers to disadvantaged single parent families in Southside Virginia and makes clear to the congregation of Aaron's Creek Baptist Church several things: its responsibilities to society, the need for its service to society, and God's mandate that it practice and minister with compassion. A field study involving church volunteers and single parent families provides observation and interview data for the project's analysis. Volunteers develop into a self-driven ministry team that needs less direction in future ministry projects.

CONTENTS

APPROVAL FORM.....	ii
COPYRIGHT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT.....	vi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT DETAILS.....	1
Introduction	1
Definition of Terms	2
Project Details	3
Objectives	3
Description and Schedule	5
Method	6
Training	7
Motivational Methods	8
Fun Day Participants	9
2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE	12
Personal Observations	12
Biblical Teachings on Community and Jesus' Example	14
The Good Samaritan	17

Isaiah 56	19
Jonah's Example	26
Widows of Acts 6	28
Summary	29
Theological Rationale	30
God's Attributes	30
Grantor of Freedom	31
God of Love	31
God of Relationships	35
Church: A Community of Faith	36
Reaching Social Concerns: One Endless Task of the Church	39
Active Compassion to Those Oppressed in Poverty	43
Reflection and Conclusion	46
3. PROJECT EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT	48
Introduction	48
Preparation	48
Fun Day Event	54
Fun Day Assessment	56
Post-Fun Day Ministry and Discovery	64
Commentary	65
Aaron's Creek Baptist Church	65
Overall Impressions and Personal Reflection	69
4. CONCLUSION	73

Appendix

1 FUN DAY SCHEDULE	75
2 FUN DAY RESOURCES	77
3 SERMON SUMMARIES	78
4 CORE GROUP TRAINING PLANS	83
5 PROJECT CALENDAR	85
6 QUESTIONNAIRE DATA	87
7 CHART RESULTS FROM TEAM QUESTIONNAIRES.....	93
WORKS CONSULTED.....	94

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT DETAILS

INTRODUCTION

Jesus urged his followers to integrate themselves into their society, calling them to serve God in public view. “And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people’” (Matt 4:19 NRSV).¹ Peter and Andrew, ordinary fishermen by trade, with ten other men were made extraordinary. Jesus called on tax collectors, homemakers, farmers, and carpenters to be the salt and light of the world (Matt 4:13-16). He assured them that they would receive power from the Holy Spirit and they would witness for God in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Jesus wants his people to be as effective and influential as they can be. The Church exists in order to make a positive impact on the hearts of people. The faithful must follow the mandate of Acts and Matthew, and “go, and make disciples.”

The Church’s obligations run to needs both material and spiritual. As Jesus recognized, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone’” (Luke 4: 4). Among those in need are single parent families who would benefit from physical, social, emotional, and spiritual support of the Church. As Jesus expects us to go the extra mile, the Church must go forward in faith (Matt 5:41-42). “For mortals it is impossible, but for God all

¹ Unless otherwise stated, biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

things are possible” (Matt 19:26). With the mandate to serve others in mind, I developed a plan to conduct an event for single parent families that I hope will move towards satisfying our obligations to those in need. My plan had two purposes.

The first was to minister services to those who need it. The more important and long-term goal, however, was to encourage and enable the congregation of Aaron’s Creek Baptist Church (Aaron’s Creek) to recognize their spiritual and practical obligations and the community’s needs, and to provide themselves the opportunity to minister.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Ministry, for the purposes of this paper, means helping to meet people’s spiritual, physical, emotional, and social needs. Ministry meets the needs of the total person. A minister is anyone who performs ministry work in a desire to please God and to serve people. Ministry is not limited to ordained clergy, and I hoped to involve the entire congregation of Aaron’s Creek in successful ministry to members of our community.

Through observation, research, and contemplation, I recognize that unconventional families have difficulties that tend not to afflict traditional families as profoundly. For the purposes of this paper, I describe a traditional family as a married couple of the opposite sex, with one or more of their offspring. More and more often, the traditional family is being replaced in society with unconventional families, the most common of which is the single parent family. In this paper, the single parent family is defined as a group of people forming a household which is headed by either a male or a female adult, typically a parent. The parent is unmarried, rearing one or more children

alone due to divorce, separation, death, abandonment, military service, or unwed motherhood. This definition includes families that are headed by any single parent figure. A grandparent, for example, may be rearing her grandchildren because her own child is serving in the military.

Deficiencies in nutrition, health care, education, social skills, budgeting, and spiritual maturity are more common in single parent families. According to the Center for Disease Control, seventy-five percent of children and adolescents in chemical dependency hospitals are products of single parent families.² The National Center for Health Statistics states that one child out of five has learning, emotional, or behavioral problems due to a change in the family structure.³ Almost seventy-five percent of American children living in single parent families will experience poverty before turning eleven-years-old, as compared to only twenty percent of children in two-parent families.⁴

PROJECT DETAILS

OBJECTIVES

In this project, I encouraged the congregation of Aaron's Creek Baptist Church in Virgilina, Virginia to become involved in the practical elements of mission work. The

² Rainbows website.n.p. [accessed 18 November 2008].
Online: <http://www.Rainbows.org/statistics.html>.

³ Rainbows website. n.p. [accessed 18 November 2008].
Online:<http://www.Rainbows.org/statistics.html>.

⁴ National Commission on Children. *Just the Facts; A Summary of Recent Information on America's Children and their Families*. Washington, DC, 1993. n.p. [accessed 18 November 2008].
Online: [http:// www.Fathers.com/content/index.php?option=com-content&task=view&id=391](http://www.Fathers.com/content/index.php?option=com-content&task=view&id=391).

project was a single parent family “Fun Day.” One of my goals was to measure how participating in this and other mission projects would lead volunteers to more proactive, personal involvement in missions and ministry.

Aaron’s Creek is located between South Boston and Clarksville, Virginia in the south-central part of the Commonwealth. This rural Southside church was organized in 1845 in order to reach more farmers in the surrounding community. There are two hundred and fifty members and an active roll of one hundred and fifty in the morning worship service. Members are professionals, retirees, and farmers of all age groups. Traditionally, Aaron’s Creek has been mission-minded, with special collections sent to mission fields through the Southern Baptist Convention, Virginia Baptist Mission Board, Dan River Baptist Association, and local charities. Early church history shows that the congregation started Sunday schools in surrounding areas and helped organize sister churches. Only since 2000, however, have members of the congregation been involved in traveling to the “uttermost parts of the earth” with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Congregation involvement has typically been limited to monetary donations and prayer. Arguably, these are great and needed contributions. However, a greater benefit would result from the congregation’s hands-on involvement in ministry.

Aaron’s Creek and its members are strongly family-oriented. They are territorial, staunch in their opinions, faith, and commitment. A few members of the congregation of every age group and social status have racist tendencies. Nevertheless, the congregation by in large has been accepting of divorcees and I have observed that the congregation is increasingly accepting of bi-racial children. I hoped that this project would enable Aaron’s Creek to open its heart to all people who are searching for the love of Christ.

I anticipated a transformation in members of the Ministry Core Group (“core group” or “ministry team”). I hoped to lead them in expanding their roles in the community, opening their arms to those experiencing loss, grief, separation, and loneliness. Additionally, I hoped to see the congregation at large increase its involvement in mission work, and the core group develop a proactive approach to larger projects with wider scopes of service.

Personally, I wanted to pull from deep within myself to answer the urgent call to reach out. I wanted to participate in the core group as it bloomed and flourished for the Lord. I wanted to respond more faithfully to the call of God through mission action.

DESCRIPTION AND SCHEDULE

Fun Day was scheduled from 9:00 AM until 2:00 PM on a Saturday in May, and the event ran until 2:35. The event was to be conducted indoors and outdoors. (See Appendix 1 for the day’s events and schedule.)

Beginning at 9:00 and until 9:45, light refreshments and time for participants to get acquainted was scheduled. A short devotional thought was led by one of the core group members, and following, each participant was welcomed while the seminars and their corresponding leaders from the volunteer group were introduced. Adult participants chose three seminars from a list of five. Seminars included: Compassion and Discipline for My Children, Grief/Loss/Coping: (Time Management, Budgeting, Being Alone), Finding Me Again: (Open Directed Discussions: Who Am I Now), Pamper Yourself with Day Spa Treatments, and Bible Search Discussion/ Applications, (Luke 10:25-37; John

11:23-44; Acts 9:36-43). The first seminar was conducted from 9:45 until 10:45. From 10:45 until 11:00, “Break and Beverages” were scheduled, when participants and volunteers had further opportunity to meet each other. From 11:00 until 12:00, Seminar Choice 2 was conducted. Lunch followed until 12:45. During lunch, the core group shared information about Aaron’s Creek activities and programs. Seminar Choice 3 ran from 12:45 until 1:45, with wrap-up between 1:45 and 2:00, with door prizes and ministry evaluations to be completed by participants. Attendance was projected according to phone reservations to the church, the pastor, and members of the core group. No one who showed up without a reservation would be turned away.

The children were scheduled their own recreation area and participated in a short version of Vacation Bible School with two Bible story sessions led by a team member.

METHOD

It was expected that the ministry team’s involvement would provide them confidence in future mission activities, allowing them to overcome their fears and negative experiences with volunteer work.

Each team member invited his or her single parent acquaintances to attend Fun Day and invited members from over one hundred area churches in a thirty-five mile radius. Written invitations were sent as opportunities arose. Fun Day was announced in the local newspapers, cable station, and area radio stations. Volunteers would have been solicited to handle taxi service if necessary. An estimated twenty-five to thirty participants were expected. However, because this was the first Fun Day, efforts were

made to schedule as many volunteers as possible, and excessive volunteers were dismissed due to a small turn-out.

TRAINING

Initial decisions regarding the scope of Fun Day and its execution were made by the pastor. The pastor planned on delegating tasks to the team, but more work was actually accomplished by allowing the team to make decisions and assign tasks via committee.

Training literature and materials included books, articles, internet resources, and information gleaned from other groups involved in similar missions. (See Appendix 2.) Denominational resources provided the core group innovative ideas to implement Fun Day, as Sunday sermons were aimed at providing jumping-off points for training and spiritual strength. (See Appendix 3.)

Fun Day was planned and carried out in six weeks. (See Appendices 4 and 5.) An initial assessment was administered to the ministry team during the course of the training. Training occurred in the first five weeks. The event and follow-up occurred on the sixth week, during which the ministry team was given another assessment designed to see how they have changed over the six-week period. (See Appendices 6 and 7.)

MOTIVATIONAL METHODS

As stated above, the congregation of Aaron's Creek tends to be generous with donations, but less so with their time. For any number of reasons a congregation may not be interested in performing actual ministry work. Reasons involve irrational and therefore difficult to overcome prejudices such as racism, isolationism, or cliquishness. These prejudices, as discussed below, were addressed directly and indirectly with Aaron's Creek. Timidity and feelings of inadequacy were also addressed within the ministry team.

Certain congregation members were enlisted and interviewed because of their insight to the needs of single parent families. For example, one lady within the congregation has been a single mother of special needs children for twenty-two years and so is intimately familiar with the challenges involved with these families. A twelve-year-old orphaned girl was interviewed to get a child's perspective with the permission of her guardian. Additionally, another congregation member and single mother of two offered to share her personal struggles in order to serve others in the same predicament.

Issues with congregation mobilization notwithstanding, Aaron's Creek was blessed to have volunteers for the Fun Day project even before it was approved by the Report and Analysis Committee. The ministry team, a dedicated group of twenty-one volunteers, was willing to do whatever it took to make the project a success. Most of these volunteers enjoyed interacting with people in the ministry capacity.

Congregation members were solicited to perform specific tasks according to their strengths and weaknesses. Several volunteers committed themselves for cooking, publicity, funding, set-up and break-down, and child care. Several men volunteered to

help with small car-check lessons for vehicles addressing antifreeze, oil, air pressure, and other important items. Additionally, four teenage girls were slated to package spa beauty items for the single mothers and to treat them as royalty for a few minutes. Three or four older women were scheduled to register the single parent families at the Fun Day and escort them to the event on the church grounds. Four others would distribute and collect the final questionnaires for the participants.

All these people volunteered their time, and many participated in training that helped them understand and relate to the single parent families. I encouraged volunteers to understand that the day would be especially designed for these families: for interaction, relationship building, and ministry opportunities. Participating in this Fun Day would bring a better understanding of who they are, what they experience, and what they need. A successful Fun Day would hopefully impress upon non-active members of the congregation the importance of this project and other ministry opportunities.

FUN DAY PARTICIPANTS

Over the last decade, this rural area has encountered a high percentage of single parent families. At the turn of this century, 2,226, or almost fifteen percent, of the households in Halifax County were headed by an unmarried mother. Of those single parent households, thirty-six percent had children under eighteen and incomes below poverty level. Forty-four percent of those homes housed children under the age of five.⁵

⁵ factfinder website. n.p. [accessed 11 November 2008]. Online: http://www.factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFacts?_event=Search&geo_id=&geoContext=&street=&county=halifax+county&cityTown=halifax+county&state=04000US51&zip=&lang=en&sse=on&ctxt=fph&pgsl=010&show_2003_tab=&redirect=Y

These families are results of divorce, death, abandonment, never-married parents, or teen pregnancy. Many local single parent families do not belong to a church. Aaron's Creek had not been ministering directly to these families prior to this project.

There are agencies and institutions that assist families in need. They cannot, however, provide the foundations of faith like the Church can. The Church is indeed a bridge of hope to countless single parent families. While it is not and should not be a social service agency, it can be an emergency aid station for families in crisis. After it meets a family's physical needs, then it can meet the family's spiritual need for Christ.

Upon death or divorce, income level usually drops dramatically in a single parent household. "The average single mother earns less than \$15,000 per year, about \$1,000 per month. Most single mothers have two children."⁶ The surviving parent may find it a daily struggle to maintain the family's needs. Pain, suffering, and grief must be dealt with in times of loss. Married friends alienate the single parent, adding to feelings of loneliness and isolation.

The diversity of the single parent family brings to the Church a force of strength which allows it to view the needs of the world more clearly. Yet single parent families may flee from a community of faith because of the disapproval, real or imagined, felt from the congregation. Single parent families are rebuilt as they are accepted. This rebuilding is an opportunity for the Church to assimilate these families into its ministries.

Single parent families are tempted and pressured to become social service statistics and they struggle with difficult choices. The Church has the opportunity to prevent this

⁶ Brenda Armstrong. "Helping the Single Parent Families Should Be Top Priority For Church." n.p. [accessed 27 November 2008]. [Online: http://www.the-goodsteward.com/article.php?articleID=872](http://www.the-goodsteward.com/article.php?articleID=872)

tragedy. Families that have embraced Christianity and the Church can have all its needs met, including the spiritual.

When the Church neglects these families, it neglects a growing population. Single parent households increased from nine percent in 1990 to sixteen percent of all households by 2000.⁷ Given this trend in growth, the Church has much work to do.

⁷ Parents Without Partners International. "Facts About Single Parent Families." n.p. [accessed 20 November 2008]. Online: <http://www.parentswithoutpartners.org>

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

PERSONAL OBESERVATIONS

Growing up in Western North Carolina, I rarely encountered any single parent family. In the 1960's and 1970's these families were few in number and my family was isolated from them. I recognized that others degraded these families, talked about them as second-class citizens, and excluded them from various social opportunities. Socially, I myself avoided these people. My community and culture viewed single parent families as trouble, and labeled them "poor."

As my brother faced divorce in 1980, all the issues associated with divorce and the stigma attached to it hit home. The plight of single parent families became apparent to me then, when I started observing families that were broken up by divorce, death of a spouse, or abandonment.

As I began to associate with members of these families, I recognized them as individuals and guarded myself from trying to remake them into my ideal or to judge them by the situation they faced. After all, these people were like all others who need and deserve acceptance, joy, and fulfillment in their lives. Often, however, they struggled just to survive each day. Many times they were emotionally and spiritually wounded and

abandoned by those they loved. I admired their perseverance in the face of their challenges.

The community saw these people as having foreign values and as failures and cheats. Through God's grace, however, I recognized them as gentle, needy, and compassionate people who were dealing with great loss. I wanted to change our society to remove the stigma of single parenthood so that the Church could take an active role in reaching this group, rather than simply adopting an apathetic, inactive position as had too many in our community. The Church had then, and has now, the duty to help guide these people in their daily lives. Otherwise, parents risk making bad situations worse by choosing inappropriately because of vulnerabilities particular to their single parent status.

Encouragement and direction go a long way in helping single parent families cope with their challenges. I find that it is my calling to help them. My own responsibilities in this regard include mobilizing my church to accept its responsibility to serve these people. If I do not, then I have not done my part to prevent their neglect, perhaps as they fall through the cracks of governmental programs. Furthermore, if I recognize their plight and fail to help them, I am failing in my own faith.

The emotional benefits of helping those in need are invaluable. I have been blessed to have baptized more than sixty people over the years and miles that resulted from my personal ministering efforts. For each, I acquired deep respect and admiration. They took risks in trusting me with their spiritual training, while I, in turn, have entrusted them to become productive ministers in the Church today. Going from a state of isolation to acceptance and fulfillment is a great step for many of them and I am filled with joy as I see them step up and share their stories with others. I still hear from my distant friends on

occasion, and their commitment to Christ reinforces my belief that I had a vital part in their spiritual pilgrimage. I know that I have made a difference to these important people in my lifetime, and thank God for the privilege.

I have learned through my studies that Christians are directed to provide spiritual guidance and nurture so others can make the choice to receive Christ or to reject him. Jesus gave us this mandate through the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). I take great comfort in the fact that Jesus helped all people. He did not discriminate between the Jews or Greeks, bond or free, poor or rich, and he came to set the people free (Gal 3:28; Luke 4:18-21).

Followers of Christ are instructed to begin first in our own Jerusalem, at home. As we see the need outside our homes, we branch outward, as did the early Church, which was constantly expanding (see Acts 1:9). The Church in Antioch, for example, sent humanitarian aid to other parts of the world as its resources increased (Acts 11).

BIBLICAL TEACHINGS ON COMMUNITY AND JESUS' EXAMPLE

Jesus taught that each person could experience salvation and that it is accessible to anyone through God's grace. Jesus opened the community of faith to any who desired it, despite barriers such as social class and nationality. Robert W. Wall states, "Jesus extended the membership list to the outside-the least, last, lame and lost of Israel" (Luke 4:16-39; 7:36-8:21; 14:12-24; 19:1-10; 23:39-43).⁸ Then, as now, social barriers have no place in the community of faith.

⁸ Robert W. Wall, "Community: New Testament *Koinonia*," *ABD* 1:1105.

Wall states, “By linking his idea of community to the metaphor ‘body of Christ,’ Paul concentrates attention on the transformed life within the community of faith, rather than on how it impacts the surrounding society.”⁹ Faith can be described as dependence upon God through devotion to Jesus Christ. This dependence is realized when the believer serves humanity. One’s faith is not dependent upon the participation of society at large. Rather, society’s transformation into a larger community of faith is the result of the faithful acting within society. As an individual is changed, so is the entire congregation.

According to this miracle story, Jesus satisfied the people’s physical needs as he led them spiritually:

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” Jesus said to them, “They need not go away; you give them something to eat.” They replied, “We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish.” And he said, “Bring them here to me.” Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and brake the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowd. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children (Matt 14:13-21).

While society tends to look down on the oppressed and downtrodden, Jesus treated everyone compassionately and taught his disciples to do the same. “Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, ‘I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat; and I do not want to send them away hungry, for they might faint on the way’” (Matt 15:32).

⁹ Wall, “Community: New Testament *Koinonia*,” *ABD* 1:1107.

Pity and compassion furthermore, were expressed in the parable of the Good Samaritan as Jesus taught a large group of people. “But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity” (Luke 10:33). As people feel compassion, the love of God draws them into his community. Inclusiveness posed a largely unidentified challenge for the congregation of Aaron’s Creek, since they traditionally have been a closed community. Before Aaron’s Creek could take on the responsibility of the community, it first had to recognize its responsibility, easily shown in biblical proofs and examples from Jesus and the early Church. The challenge of Aaron’s Creek’s leadership, then, was to convince this too often inactive congregation that taking on the duties of society was a spiritual matter and a requirement of its faith. Of course, not everyone is traditionally set in this closed-minded pattern, and key members of the congregation can usually help leadership transform church members into the disciples they should be.

Jesus is the best example of instruction outside of the temple, and people should strive to act as he did. “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps” (1 Pet 2:21). If the Church fails to emulate Jesus, love in Christ becomes stagnant and may even verge on dying.

Considering God’s loyal love, Leslie C. Allen states two factors that need to be recognized:

First, the whole creation is dependent on Yahweh for his providential work. He it is who relieves human distress and affliction, and supplies resources for the hungry throughout the world. Second, Yahweh’s loving care is demonstrated especially to that group of people who are privileged to invoke his name in worship, the community of Israel. [Their] needs too are met.¹⁰

¹⁰ Leslie C. Allen, *Psalm 101-150* (WBC, 21; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983), 298.

God will come to a world in need under any circumstances. Likewise, we must come to society's aid when called upon.

Jesus traveled the countryside, to villages and cities to reach the oppressed (Matt 8:1-17; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 17:11-19; John 4). According to Hendrikus Berkhof, "Jesus was a rabbi, a miracle worker, a prophet, a sage-all these combined because he was more than all this and did not fit any available category."¹¹ Jesus did not sit behind tables of scholars, kings, or powerful world leaders. He traveled outside the synagogue to where the people lived, disregarding class, race, and gender. He came to seek and to save those that were lost, and directed his disciples to do the same (Luke 19:10).

Jesus announced that the spirit of the Lord was upon him to preach. He came to heal the broken hearted, preach to the captives, recover sight to the blind, free those who were bruised, and preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18-19). Berkhof continues, "Therefore in his preaching and with his healing miracles he directed himself especially to the sick, sinners, the demon possessed, children, poor, Gentiles, all who according to the prevailing religious standards could not inherit the kingdom."¹² They knew that Jesus cared and his love was true. People found acceptance in him.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

The story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:29-37 tells us that we must minister to our neighbors. A certain man asked Jesus to define who his neighbor was. Jesus

¹¹ Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1979), 275.

¹² Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, 276.

responded with a parable. A man was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho and was attacked by robbers on a very dangerous road. He was stripped of his clothes, beaten, and left half-dead by the robbers. It just so happened that a Priest came by and after seeing the victim, continued his journey. Later a Levite passed by, and like the Priest, he also continued on his way. Then a Samaritan man, a social outcast of the era, encountered the half-dead man, came by and moved by pity, suspended his busy schedule and journey in order to care for him. The Samaritan nursed this dying man, sheltered him in an inn, and later came back to settle the payment for his care. Jesus asked after sharing this story, “Which one of these men was a neighbor to the man who was robbed? The response was, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus then said, “Go and do the same.”

Bernard Brandon Scott suggests, “The appealing and frightening aspect of the parable from Jerusalem to Jericho (Luke 10:30-35) is the recognition that on this journey from Jerusalem to Jericho the recurring effort of humans to divide themselves from others is severely challenged and called into question.”¹³ We see this in the Samaritan’s attitude and conduct. Scott continues:

As parable, the story subverts the effort to order reality into known hierarchy of Priest, Levite, and Israelite. Utterly rejected is any notion that the kingdom can be marked off as religious: the map no longer has barriers. The kingdom does not separate insiders and outsiders on the basis of religious categories.¹⁴

Nationalistic and religious exclusivity were no longer accepted as normal entryways into the kingdom of God, nor are they acceptable today. Furthermore, as Jonathan Edwards states:

¹³ Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 189-90.

¹⁴ Scott, *Parable*, 202.

If one of our neighbors suffers through the fault of a particular person, of a thief or robber, or if a town, it alters not the case: but if he suffer and be without relief, it is an act of Christian charity in us to relieve him. Now it is too obvious to be denied that there are in fact persons so in want, that it would be a charitable act in us to help them, notwithstanding all that is done by the town. A man must hide his mental eyes, to think otherwise.¹⁵

In other words, the availability, or even abundance, of social services and aid for the needy is not an acceptable excuse for a Christian's inaction.

ISAIAH 56

An early example of God's invitation to all of society can be found in Isaiah. "Ho, every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa 55:1). Such starts God's widespread invitation of Isa 55 to all who would listen. Universality is an approach to religion that cultivates faith. The more diverse the people, the stronger they are as they perform God's commands. John D.W. Watts discusses:

The universal openness apparent in the great invitation of 55:1-8 is real. This was a simple invitation to the people as one of restoration and repentance as it is seen on the horizon. It is applied in 56:1-8 to the stranger who joins God's people and the eunuchs. Undoubtedly, these are intended as examples of all classes of people who had been kept at a distance. In time women and all disabled persons would be included.¹⁶

People who were once excluded were now able to become a part of the community of faith with all its rights and privileges. As Walter Brueggemann states, "The community

¹⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* Vol.2 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2005), 173.

¹⁶ John D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, (WBC 25; Waco, Tex.: Words Books Publishers, 2005), 822.

of Judaism [was finally] to be a community that remember[ed], cherish[ed], and preserv[ed] the name and identity of those otherwise nullified in an uncaring world.”¹⁷

Being accepted into this community of faith was the beginning of a new life.

Brueggemann continues:

Yahweh is the recruiter and the welcoming committee. As a consequence, the foreigners are inducted into the full life of the worshipping community, participating in both prayer and sacrifice. They are welcome! They are welcome because Yahweh intends that “my holy mountain....my house of prayer” (v.7) will be for all people who want to join, all who love, all who obey (See Matt 21:13; Mark 11:17; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6).¹⁸

Yahweh is the one who inspires mankind to enter his community. By extension then, the modern house of God must not be exclusive, but instead be a house for mankind.

Although the scriptures were used to justify Israel’s non-acceptance of “flawed” members of society, Isaiah enlightens us as to God’s expectations and promise that whatever the ailment of the suppliant, adherence to God will be rewarded (Isa 56:1-8). The Lord commands the people to administer justice in performing the ethical and moral obligations of society, which brings salvation and deliverance for humanity. Isaiah 56:1-2 suggest that maintaining justice meant that everyone was to be treated similarly. From a legal perspective, there was no distinction between an authentic Israelite and a foreigner. Once morality and justice were assured, the process of an all-inclusive Israel began.

Brueggeman discusses the significance of word choice of Isa 56:1-2. He states that the verses “[contain] two differing word pairs that stand in a delicate relationship to each other. The first word pair is an imperative address by Yahweh to the community of faith:

¹⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988), 171.

¹⁸ Brueggemann, *Isaiah*, 172.

‘Maintain justice and do what is right.’”¹⁹ God demanded that his people act justly and in moral correctness. Obeying this mandate focused the Israelites’ commitment to God, which resulted in a more diverse Israel. As Joseph Blenkinsopp discusses, “The first (v.1) is followed by an interpretative comment of the seer explaining what the injunction to maintain justice and do what is right implies and how broad its scope (vv. 2-3).”²⁰

Brueggemann continues, “The second word pair is a promise from Yahweh: salvation and deliverance.”²¹ God is offering salvation and deliverance to anyone who seeks it, including the vulnerable group. Blenkinsopp adds, “The initial oracle (v.1) urges the practice of justice and righteousness in view of an imminent salvific intervention in human affairs by the God of Israel.”²² This intervention changed the lives of the Israelites as well as the newly accepted foreigners.

Brueggemann argues, “These two verses together envision a community that is intensely and intentionally committed to the practice of Torah. The Torah brings every phase of life under obedience to Yahweh; it states distinctive ethics of Jewishness that in the end consists in attentiveness to and enhancement of the neighborly community.”²³ Community improvement and societal order were primary purposes of the Torah. Through the constant care and concern of the community, the Torah remained unspoiled in God’s ultimate plan.

¹⁹ Brueggemann, *Isaiah*, 168.

²⁰ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*. . (AB 19B; New York: Doubleday, 2003), 131.

²¹ Brueggemann, *Isaiah*, 169.

²² Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, 132.

²³ Brueggemann, *Isaiah*, 169.

The faithful of the foreigners and eunuchs were promised a place in God's kingdom. No special heritage or abilities were necessary; keeping the Sabbath and his covenant, remembrance and worship were all that were required of these people.

Foreigners were addressed in Isa 56 because large numbers of them were already associating with the Israelites from their years of bondage in Egypt and later in Babylon. The many nomads of the period were also foreigners, who left their homeland for various reasons.

Blenkinsopp explains, "The term 'foreigner' usually translated (*ben-hannekar*, elsewhere *nokri*) can refer to one who is not a member of the household (Gen 17:12; 27; 31:15) but more commonly designates a non-Israelite (e.g., 2 Sam 15:19; 22:45-46) and therefore a worshiper of 'foreign gods' (Gen 35:4; Deut 31:16; Josh 24: 20 etc.)."²⁴ Other nations knew about the one true God, and if they wanted God to be their God, they could easily become his people.

Israel was pressed to maintain an open community of faith. Yet, as Ronald E. Clements suggests, "The uniqueness of Israel's conception of Yahweh its God might easily have led to a narrow and exclusive attitude in regard to him, so much so that such a faith would in no way have broadened out to become a universal religion."²⁵ This narrow view excluded many from the house of God, offering little hope for the Gentiles of the Old and New Testament and for the general population today. According to Clements:

Several factors have contributed to Israel's wider understanding of God, which was no contest to think of him as the God of Israel in a restrictive and purely nationalistic fashion. First of all we must certainly place the belief in Yahweh's role as Creator of the material universe. A further element in the direction of

²⁴ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, 136.

²⁵ Ronald E. Clements, *Old Testament Theology: A Fresh Approach* (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox, 1978), 76.

widening Israel's understanding of God has certainly been contributed by the prophetic insistence upon Yahweh's control of all nations and their histories. A third element in the move towards universal faith must be accorded to the unique moral emphasis in the Israelite understanding of Yahweh.²⁶

These three elements, creation, control, and morality, contributed to the growth of the people of Israel. God is the creator of the material and spiritual universe and controls the movement of nations. Furthermore, the moral emphasis to treat people fairly was designed and desired by God, and thus should expand the community of faith to all people and nations.

However, God ordered Israel to take action against other nations for its own protection and to eradicate idol worship. As commanded, Israel destroyed the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites among others (Jer 47-49). Foreigners who approached Israel sometimes brought with them forbidden pagan practices. So when outsiders approached, Israel tended to act with hatred and skepticism.

Brotherly love for these foreigners was, then, a precious act of faith on the part of the Israelites, as they feared corruption within the temple. Philip Schaff explains, "The brotherly love expressed itself, above all, in the most self-sacrificing beneficence to the poor and sick, to widows and orphans, to strangers and prisoners, particularly to confessors in bonds."²⁷ Compassion meant that one would give up one's life for another.

The foreigners referred to in Isa 56 were looking for a place to call home and a strong nation in faith with whom to affiliate. Blenkinsopp states, "The foreigners of 56:1-8 are quite different from those who will be put to work at menial tasks in the imagined

²⁶ Clements, *Theology*, 76-77.

²⁷ Philip Schaff, *Anti-Nicene Christianity: From the Death of John the Apostle to Constantine the Great*, (vol. 2 of *History of the Christian Church*; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006), 374.

Jewish commonwealth of the future (60:10; 61:5) a fortiori, from the foreigners who occupy the country and live off it (62:8).”²⁸ Some of the foreigners would become influential individuals; others would submit to slave status for the privilege of being part of the faith and the nation. Inclusion was a painful step for the Israelites, as it brought the foreigners social status equal to the Israelites.

God mandated the invitation to enter the community of faith, eliminating the moral, ethical, and political choices involved with maintaining an open door policy. By recognizing a vulnerable group like the foreigners, which included their orphans and widows, God allowed other groups to enter the faith community as well. God is the God of all who call for help and direction.

Isaiah makes clear that Sabbath worship is for all the faithful. “These I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isa 56:7). Blenkinsopp states, “The assurance addressed to the eunuchs (vv 4-5) comes with three conditions attached: Sabbath observance, choosing what is pleasing to YHWH, and holding fast to the covenant.”²⁹ Until Isaiah was revealed, eunuchs were practicing properly, yet they were not fully accepted within the community. Watts proposes, “They were prominent at court, but forbidden to enter the temple.... ‘I am a dried-up tree’ was apparently a deprecating remark about their inability to father children.”³⁰ The revelation of Isaiah, however, changed that. Claus Westermann suggests, “There is the new possibility of living on in the community, even although one

²⁸ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, 137.

²⁹ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, 139.

³⁰ Watts, *Isaiah*, 820.

is a 'dry tree' - The new community is on the way to a new form of association which is no longer identical with the old concept of the chosen people."³¹

The eunuchs' inclusion led to Israel's growth and a nurturing of faith. They proved themselves to be more than dried up trees; they were believers. As long as they worshipped as commanded, they were as acceptable to God as any Israelite.

Israel was instructed to hold to the covenant of the Old Testament in order to ensure their special relationship with God. This covenant was directed also to those on the fringes of faith, who were assured that God would always be there for them. God swore on oath not only to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but also to future generations (Deut 29: 10-15).

As Israel's population grew, the original chosen people were outnumbered. Increasing numbers of non-Israelites felt compelled to worship the God of Israel, and as the nation's population increased, there was a need for them in the temples of Israel. The diverse population contributed to Israel's becoming more influential, stronger, and more effective for God.

The assurance of acceptance opened the door to not only being part of the people of Israel, but being a part of temple worship which was very important. Concerning Isa.

56, Blenkinsopp says:

The assurance given to individuals of foreign descent (vv 6-7) also stipulates Sabbath observances and holding fast to the covenant. Ministering to the God of Israel, loving his name, and being his servants are not further stipulations but profile what is implied in being members of the community, as the speaker understands it.³²

³¹ Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* (OTL; Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1969), 314.

³² Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, 140.

Through this assembly, the people felt like a part of the faith community though they were not officially recognized. Blenkinsopp goes on to say,

But the assurance given to the eunuchs carries weight only because their memory will live on “in my house and within my walls” What this implies is membership in good standing in the Jerusalem cult community (‘in my house’), with which civic status- that is, status “within the walls,” meaning in the city- was at that time inseparably united.³³

The “house of prayer for all people” allowed other ethnic groups to come into the temple worship as well.

An open community of faith was a concept to which the Israelites had to adapt quickly. Westermann suggests, “The opening of the community to eunuchs and foreigners, too, is made in the context of the promise that Yahweh is to gather the dispersed of Israel- he ‘gathers’ Israel also from those who hitherto have not been able to belong to her.”³⁴ This is great news for all people who yearned to be a part of God’s people, and it applies today. Through the prophet Isaiah, the hope of Jesus’ birth shined in the hearts of Israel for the first time. “For a child has been born unto us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6).

JONAH’S EXAMPLE

Jonah’s story shows that God’s ability to bestow mercy is not dependent on his servants, but that his servants are dependent on him. God instructed Jonah to go to

³³ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, 139.

³⁴ Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 315.

Nineveh, a great and wicked city and to warn its people of God's wrath. Jonah, unwilling to do as God commanded, foolishly tried to flee from God by going to Joppa and boarding a ship for Tarshish. We see how Jonah's rebelliousness, mercilessness, cynicism, and disobedience were manifested in his attitude toward the Ninevites (Jonah 1:1-3, 3:1-6). His tunnel vision and his arrogance set in motion one of God's greatest stories of love and compassion. Because of, and despite his rebellious and disobedient nature, God's plan through Jonah was accomplished.

Why would God have spared the Ninevites when he destroyed so many evildoers? According to Julius A. Bewer, "The sins of the Ninevites are moral and social; of idolatry the author does not speak. Their way is general. The violence that is in their hands refers to social oppression practiced by them, rather than to Nineveh's cruelty to other nations."³⁵ These problems were difficult to address. As long as social oppression continued, the outcasts could not be accepted into the family of God.

It is noted that Jonah had more pity on a vine (Jonah 4:1-11) than on the Ninevites. Douglas Stuart comments, "Throughout the book Jonah displays a readiness to receive mercy and blessing himself and a stubborn reluctance to see his enemies, the Assyrians, receive the same."³⁶ Regardless of God's reason for choosing compassion over destruction, Jonah was wrong to have second-guessed God's wisdom. Jonah lost the broader vision of God's love, and the Church must guard itself from doing the same.

³⁵ Julius A. Bewer, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jonah." in *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Jonah* (vol. 28 of ICC. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), 55.

³⁶ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (Vol. 31 of WBC; Waco, Tex.: Words Book Publishers, 1987), 434.

WIDOWS OF ACTS 6

During the first century, the early Church and its resources grew, allowing the Church to serve a vast number of people. Unfortunately, the Church experienced growing pains as well. According to Paul W. Walaskay:

The [Hebrews] of this community were Aramaic-speaking Jews (like the apostles) who had grown up in Palestine, while the “Hellenists” were Greek-speaking who had either moved to Jerusalem or were visiting the Holy City from the diaspora (diaspora refers to Jewish communities outside of Palestine)... The Greek-speaking widows who had been drawn into the Christian community were in need and apparently were being neglected by the Aramaic-speaking “Hebrew” members of the Church.³⁷

The Hellenists (Jewish Christians of Greek ancestry), observed that food was not being distributed fairly and that the widows were going hungry. The Hellenists complained to the Hebrews and action was taken to rectify the situation (Acts 6).

If their relationship with God was one of haphazard communication then someone needed to complain about the widow’s neglect. Robert W. Wall says:

The prophets make clear that the treatment of its poor and powerless effectively gauges Israel’s relationship with God (Mal 3:5; Zech 7:10) and heralds repentant Israel’s renewed covenant with God (Isa 47:8). For this reason, the Hellenists were right to lodge their complaint.³⁸

If they neglected the poor then they also neglected God.

The neglect could have been due to the influx of people into the early Church. With Jerusalem expanding, it would have been easy to overlook them. Alternatively, the increased demand on the Church may have resulted in scarce supplies for the needy.

³⁷ Paul W. Walaskay, *Acts*, (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 68-69.

³⁸ Robert W. Wall, “The Book of Acts: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections.” in *Acts, Introduction to Epistolary Literature, Romans, & 1 Corinthians* (ed. Leander E. Keck; vol. 10 of NIB. ed. Leander E. Keck; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2002), 111.

There were problems within the infrastructure of the Church as well. As more people lived closer together, the system was strained and people went lacking for necessities. Inaccurate records could have also contributed to distribution problems. Whatever the reason for the neglect, the Church had to readjust distribution to satisfy the needs of the community.

There was, however, no adequate excuse for the widows to have been neglected. J. Bradley Chance suggests, “Still, the Old Testament made it clear that ‘widows’ are a special group that God’s people are not to neglect (See Deut 24:19-21; 26:12-13), intentional or not, this oversight requires correction.”³⁹ They had the right to the Church’s extra attention, as do modern day, single parent families.

SUMMARY

As the abovementioned biblical references and commentary prove, God includes all people in his kingdom and requires the Church to ensure that no one is alienated from it, or from opportunities to worship God. The Church’s responsibilities extend to ensuring that single parent families receive the care and compassion of Jesus.

Within the congregation of Aaron’s Creek Church, at least eighteen members are from single parent families. In Halifax County, the rise in single parent families emphasizes the need for outreach. This segment of society must be reached if the church is to continue its mandate from Christ.

³⁹ J. Bradley Chance, *Acts*: (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Co., 2007), 104.

Aaron's Creek has the resources to take on social issues in the area. Furthermore, it has the responsibility to take care of our "modern day widows" (Acts 6). Jesus is free to all and we must share the compassion that Jesus showed to others. In addition, just as God made himself available to those who called upon him in Isa 55-56, we must offer ourselves to others. As God accepted the faithful who repented, we must not be exclusive. As God removed the stigma attached to foreigners, strangers, widows, orphans, and eunuchs, we must not look down upon those who do not fit our ideals (Deut 10:17-18; 15:7; Isa 56:3-4). And as Israel was commanded to accept those into the community, we are commanded to take these as our neighbors.

THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

GOD'S ATTRIBUTES

One's understanding of who God is defines our actions when worshiping him, when dealing with others and when acting in charity, and therefore it is important to understand the scope of God's character as much as a human is able.

Most notable of God's many attributes are those of omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence. God is all-knowing, ever-present and all-powerful, but God is also the God of relationships within and between clans, groups, communities, and all individuals. The Psalmist says, "Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there

your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast” (Ps 139:7-10). These attributes are present in every aspect of the individual’s life. Through God’s presence, knowledge, and power they recognize his gentle care for them. In the tragic and celebrated events of these people, God’s presence is acknowledged. As God is omnipresent, God’s hand is ever present.

GRANTOR OF FREEDOM

Clements states, “Yahweh, the God of Israel, is the God of freedom, the champion of the oppressed, the guardian of the poor and the avenger of those who have been unjustly treated.”⁴⁰ As the Grantor of Freedom, God allows us to follow his path or to rebel against all hope. Freedom thrives when we have an intimate relationship with God, as demonstrated by the prophets in the Old Testament. Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and countless other prophets gained their freedom through their relationships with Almighty God. God brings to humanity freedom, acceptance, and a place to call home in his spiritual kingdom.

GOD OF LOVE

God loves humanity. The idea of love is described in 1 John 4:11: “Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.” Jesus promises that God’s love is available even to the Samaritan woman at the well:

⁴⁰ Clements, *Theology*, 56.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?” (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get this living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?” Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water” (John 4:7-15).

As Jesus offered the Samaritan woman God’s love, her acceptance increased her understanding of God’s love. God’s love manifested itself throughout Christ’s life as he associated with ordinary people. As William Klassen says, “The obligation to love springs out of that Divine initiative. We ought to love one another, because God thus loved us (paraphrasing 1 John 4:11). The importance of this love for each is stressed as a manifestation of God (1 John 2:5; 4:17-18).”⁴¹ The divine obligation to love others as God loves us provides us one of our greatest opportunities to minister and to showcase God’s active and responsive nature.

According to Clements, “Love often knows no limits but overflows all bounds. Love feels no burden, thinks nothing of troubles, attempts more than it is able, and does not plead impossibility.... For this reason, it is able to do all, performing and effecting much where he who does not love fails and falls.”⁴² With God, there are no limits, but his divine work is not complete until we share him with others. Klassen states, “The emergence of formulas like ‘the God of Love’ (2 Cor 13:11) and the ‘love of Jesus

⁴¹ William Klassen, “NT and Early Jewish Literature,” *ABD* 4:391.

⁴² Clements, *Theology*, 61.

Christ' (Rom 8:35) in early communities shows that they were able to develop both theology and a Christology of love."⁴³ This love was available in the mighty hand of God as he performed his acts of righteousness (Judg 5:11; 1 Sam 12:7; Prov 15:29; 18:10; 28:1; Isa 11:4-5; 46:13; 53:11; 61:10; Jer 33:16; Matt 3:15, 25; John 17:25; Heb 1:9; 1 John 1:1-2; 2:29), and in the prophecy of the Messiah (Isa 7:14; 9:6-7; 11:1-10; 53; Jer 23:5; Dan 9:24-27; Zech 3:8; Matt 1:21-23; 12:18-21; Heb 6:20).

Scriptures show that God loves people. Moses and the Israelites' delivery from Egypt are perfect examples of God's love, as he provided them sustenance throughout their trip to the Promised Land (Exod 6:5-7; 17: 5-7; 16:4-35; Num 11:6-10; Neh 9:21). God also showed his love by sending the Messiah to the Jews (Luke 1:67-80).

As missionary groups travel internationally, they often come back transformed, with an increased awareness of blessings often taken for granted. On my recent trip to Africa, I was so transformed that my new-found enthusiasm spread throughout the Aaron's Creek congregation. Sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ became the congregation's first priority, and as a result of a flood of donations, a new ministry to Africa was developed. We raised money for three water wells in Africa and supplied Bibles to eleven church starts. Aaron's Creek now supports a pastor in South Africa and will for the next three years. We are actively praying for the work in South Africa because of the ownership the church feels in the project. The South African pastor came to America and visited our congregation and expressed his gratitude for our financial help. He told us that our offering of \$2,750 for the Sunday school would be enough money to support a pastor and Church for one year. As it has seen what a difference it

⁴³ Klassen, "NT and Early Jewish Literature," *ABD* 4:395.

can make, the congregation continues to find new ways to reach the people of South Africa, including sponsoring a trip for me and my wife to teach and train pastors there.

James says it best: “But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like” (Jas 1: 22-24).

The challenge, then, is in persuading congregations to participate wholeheartedly in charity. But as Thomas a’Kempis states, charitable actions without love are fruitless. He says:

Without charity external work is of no value, but anything done in charity, be it ever so small and trivial, is entirely fruitful inasmuch as God weighs the love with which a man acts rather than the deed itself. He does much who loves much.... He does well who serves the common good rather than his own interests.⁴⁴

Actions always speak louder than words, yet our actions mean nothing unless we also exhibit a charitable spirit.

Klassen states, “Love for enemies and our fellow Christians are not in conflict with each other—they nurture and nourish each other. Both are empowered by the divine initiative of love.”⁴⁵ As we have much in common, we learn from our enemies and we teach them compassion. Evidence of God’s compassion can even be seen in the example of Pharaoh, who allowed the Israelites to leave Egypt before changing his mind. And though his heart was hardened, God continued to speak to Pharaoh through Moses time after time (Exod 5-14).

⁴⁴ Thomas a’ Kempis, *Imitation of Christ* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 14.

⁴⁵ Klassen, “NT and Early Jewish Literature,” *ABD* 4:392.

Christ not only taught of the Kingdom, he worked to make it available to everyone, as we should when addressing the needs of others. Jesus promoted the coming kingdom by giving his life. Klassen further states, “Love was therefore freely communicated to Christians, first towards each other, then to all people, including the enemy.”⁴⁶ This love is communicated in times of peace, war, famine, and death. As long as creation has existed, God has been available to any who call.

GOD OF RELATIONSHIPS

The priesthood of all believers allows the one-on-one relationship we have with God our Savior, Jesus Christ to come into better view, as our ability to communicate directly with God is a requirement for our relationship. This translates to our relationships with people. Clements states: “The most telling and moving pictures of the relationship between God and his people are those which draw upon the realm of human relationships.”⁴⁷ In our relationships, the personal nature of God is permeated in the spiritual and physical growth process. These relationships relate to our own personalities and are special because God controls them if we allow him to do so. If one cooks a meal for someone to eliminate hunger, then it is an act of kindness. When that same person teaches another individual how to fish he may save a life and, in doing so, demonstrates God’s love. A person’s actions really do speak louder than words.

⁴⁶ Klassen, “NT and Early Jewish Literature,” *ABD* 4:395.

⁴⁷ Clements, *Theology*, 60.

John sums up the importance of love manifested: “How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action” (1 John 3:17-18). Ministering is an elegant solution that both demonstrates God’s love to others and allows us to maintain our relationships with God and with others.

CHURCH: A COMMUNITY OF FAITH

The Church at Jerusalem grew through the dedicated lives of Christ’s servants, most notably, the apostle Peter. The Church grew to a point that it could expand its reach, sending other apostles to spread the word of God, thus promoting the Christian movement. Philip Schaff states, “The congregation of Jerusalem became the Mother Church of Jewish Christianity, and thus of all Christendom.... As to his official position in the Church, Peter stood from the beginning at the head of the Jewish apostles, not in a partisan sense, but in a spirit of moderation and comprehension.”⁴⁸ Peter had a heart for people and promoted Christianity and the promise of the Kingdom of God.

It was imperative that the foundation of Christianity be secure in faith, love, and purity. “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the father, is this: to care for the orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (Jas 1:27). The foundations of love

⁴⁸ Philip Schaff, *Apostolic Christianity: From the Birth of Christ to the Death of St John, A.D. 1-100*. (vol. 1 of *History of the Christian Church*; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006), 256.

and faith and its quest for purity have been the reasons that the Church continues to exist today.

The potential of the Church is that of a society-saving organism. The Church should be, and is in some cases, on the front lines of charity more than any social agency. Furthermore, it has the potential and compassion to understand the human condition better than any other.

In ancient times, secularism influenced God's people. Paul D. Hanson states of the Israelite community that, "Israel began as a sacral community, that is, as a people organized tribally under the God Yahweh; with the introduction of kingship, however, tribal theocratic structure gave way to more secular structures of empire."⁴⁹ The secular styles and structures created difficulties for worshipers. The various kings and prophets throughout the era sometimes agreed with each other, but at other times were at odds. Throughout time this resulted in an increase in the methods available to worship God, allowing in some cases a deeper faith.

Eventually, Israel opened to all who desired a relationship with God in some way. Robert W. Wall explains that "Biblical faith forms a community of those who worship God, who share with one another a common experience of God's salvation and a common call to bear witness to God's salvation-creating power in the world."⁵⁰ This experience gives people hope and a new beginning.

The importance of the commonality of experience and traits is emphasized through a Christian's life. Many Christians believe that governmental agencies should take over the responsibility for the needy in our society. When we witness charity within the

⁴⁹ Paul D. Hanson, "Community: Old Testament," *ABD* 1:1099.

⁵⁰ Wall, "Community: New Testament *Koinonia*," *ABD* 1:1103.

community, however, we develop a better understanding of the role that the community plays in faith.

Salvation is a lifestyle change which we see in others' lives as the Church meets their needs. State agencies cannot offer this salvation. The power of the faith community within Aaron's Creek Baptist Church is not found in itself, but in the power of God that flows through all believers. John states: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). The use of the word "everyone" in this verse directs all of Christianity to share God's love.

Believers who share their faith and selves make their community a source of support and energy. Wall explains, "The Church is viewed by Paul as *koinonia*-a community of believers who share in equal partnership the spiritual, physical, and material benefits of Gods beneficence as mediated by the Spirit in concert with the risen Christ and God's redemptive program disclosed in him."⁵¹ Through this shared partnership, charity is spread throughout the community. If the Church passively sits by allowing the state to take over completely, it has lost power in its *koinonia*.

We live out the mandate that Christ has given to us in Matt 25:31-46, when we are told to visit the prisoner, feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, clothe the naked, take in the stranger, and visit the sick. Jesus tells us that inasmuch as we do these things for people, we do them for our Lord. As we perform services for those in need, we quickly see how powerful and influential we become as a result. On the other hand, if the Church is not active in charity today, it will struggle in the future to maintain its existence.

⁵¹ Wall, "Community:New Testament *Koinonia*," *ABD* 1:1107.

REACHING SOCIAL CONCERNS: ONE ENDLESS TASK OF THE CHURCH

So then, what is the task of the Church in our modern day? Hendrikus Berkhof states:

The task of the congregation in this area needs the stimulating model of a pace-setting institution, which shows love and mercy. By that example, the congregation must continually be reminded that diaconal service is not an optimal application or a consequence of the salvation given her, but that this service concerns salvation itself in its comprehensive material, social, political, and universal aspects.⁵²

Mercy and love describe who we are. Like the early Church, our duties are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and lead the blind. As Donald G. Bloesch recognizes, providing for the physical needs of the population must come first: “Social service (*diakonia*) sometimes takes chronological priority over preaching of the Gospel since, if our hearers are in dire physical distress or material need, they will not listen to our message until these immediate concerns are dealt with.”⁵³

The parable of the ten bridesmaids in Matt 25:1-13 teaches us to be prepared for ministry opportunities. The five wise bridesmaids were prepared for their bridegroom at midnight. The five unprepared women, on the other hand, were rejected as they foolishly neglected to fill their lamps when they had the opportunity. As Michael J. Anthony and Carolyn A. Koons state, “It is important that the Church be prepared to provide the outcasts with a nonjudgmental and caring climate of acceptance. If pastoral staff

⁵² Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Story of Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1979), 370.

⁵³ Donald G. Bloesch, *Life, Ministry and Hope* (Vol. 2 of *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 168.

members and lay leaders model Christian qualities of love and forgiveness, others in the congregation will be encouraged to follow suit.”⁵⁴ The Church will ultimately find its place in society bringing new hope and life.

The parable of the talents in Matt 25:14-30, directs our attention to use what we have been given and invest it wisely in the kingdom of God. An owner of three slaves had given them each an amount of his wealth to care for. To the first slave, the owner gave five talents; to the second, he gave two; the third slave was given one. The first and second, then, invested the money, which resulted in gain. The third slave, however, afraid of losing the talent and risking his owner becoming angry, buried it in the ground. Rather than being pleased with the slave, however, the owner took the talent back and banished the slave. Humanity is called upon to manage what our Lord and Master has entrusted to us. As we carry out our responsibilities, we please God.

In Deut 14:29, the Israelites were charged with caring for the needy in the community. “The Levites, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake.” The Levites, while not poor per se, were temple caretakers and did not have the right to own land. In his work on Deuteronomy, Brueggemann states, “The landed bring an offering that is for the joy and well-being of the landless. The text names three traditional landless, vulnerable groups: resident aliens, orphans, and widows, these who depend

⁵⁴ Michael J. Anthony and Carolyn A. Koons, *Single Adult Passage: Uncharted Territories* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991), 134.

upon the generosity of the community for their survival.”⁵⁵ This tithe was taken out every third year. As Clements explains, this indicated a full tithe was to be given to those people who were in need:

The ruling that the tithe of every third year was to be wholly given for the benefit of the Levites marks a further element of deuteronomic legislation that recognized that the Levites were in special need of support—a feature already remarked upon in connection with the social and political affinities of the deuteronomists. It is, at the same time, startling in its assumption that such a system of triennial additional support for the Levites, who are assumed in any case to benefit from the usual tithe offering, would be sufficient to enhance their situation within the community.⁵⁶

As the Levites had no property rights, according to political and social standards, they had rights similar to the destitute, which permitted them a relationship to the general population that they would not otherwise have had.

The Israelites were astounded at the number of needy people among them. Mark E. Biddle explains, “The tithe should be given to the needy and dispossessed at home: the Levite without inheritance, the sojourner without citizenship in Israel, the widow without property rights and minor orphans.”⁵⁷ These people found themselves pushed out of their own land, living below poverty level and had no family on which to depend. Biddle further states, “In positive terms, more fortunate Israelites must take active measures to meet the basic physical needs of these segments of society. And they must do so in ways that will not subject the needy to humiliation.”⁵⁸ Leaving grain in the field, grapes on the

⁵⁵ Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy* (Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 2001), 162.

⁵⁶ Clements, *NIB* 2: 403-4.

⁵⁷ Mark E. Biddle, *Deuteronomy* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, Georgia: Smyth & Helwys, 2003), 255.

⁵⁸ Biddle, *Deuteronomy*, 365.

vine, olives on the ground, and fruit unpicked allowed the Levites to feed themselves by their own labor, allowing them to retain their dignity.

Likewise, churches exist to care for people of any or no faith and must offer compassion to the outcast. J. Clark Hensley explains the functionality of the Church as follows:

Churches exist to build up persons in the mood of faith, not of doubt; of hope, not of despair; of love, not of denunciation and fault-finding. No doubt God judges the Church by the height of her ideas, the range of her sympathies, and the reach of her aspirations, the depth of her convictions, and the graciousness of her disposition. All Church members should be concerned about the dimensions of the soul of the Church.⁵⁹

The Church must be a good steward of the resources God provides and be careful not to become a social welfare system in its rush to help the needy. Determination of needs and execution must be carefully exercised. Care must also be taken to maintain people's dignity and self-worth.

Ministry varies from place to place and from situation to situation. What may be a thriving ministry in one church may fail in another. Not every church will minister the same way and get the same results. Each has its own heart and calling, which may change from one year to the next. The calling must match the community and its needs. Anthony and Koons speak of ministry:

Ministry in the early Christian Church was based on the characteristics of people in specific time and place. Church ministry in Jerusalem just after Pentecost was conducted differently from later ministries in Antioch, Ephesus or Corinth. The structure of worship, the programs that were developed, and other elements of ministry changed from city to city according to the needs of the people in a local body of believers.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ J. Clark Hensley, *Coping With Being Single Again* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1978), 116.

⁶⁰ Anthony, *Single Adult Passage*, 174.

Locality and conditions make a difference in how effective a church may be. An American structure of ministry necessarily differs from that of a third world country. Each church must evaluate the needs around them. Increasingly, places of worship must respond to the vulnerable and prepare themselves to become active parts of the Kingdom of God.

ACTIVE COMPASSION TO THOSE OPPRESSED IN POVERTY

The Ten Commandments were written to bring faithfulness and exclusive devotion to God. They were also written to promote a fair and orderly community of faith. Laws concerning treatment of servants, acts of violence, responsibility of owners, restitution, and human relations were all included in this message to the Israelites (Exod 20-22).

Ronald L. Johnstone says, “Religious groups have in fact always reflected the historical ambivalence in American society at large regarding rugged individualism and self-sufficiency and responsibility verses social concerns, welfarism, and mutual responsibility for one’s fellow man.”⁶¹ However, the Church is in a position to provide for those whom we categorize as the outcasts of society. This categorization is explained by Brueggemann and in Deut 24:14-22:

This “class analysis” done here is itself important because it insists upon recognition that the poor-widow, orphan, alien-are different, have different needs and entitlements. Beyond class analysis, the social dynamics of “haves” and “have nots” are framed Yahwistically by sanctions (vv. 13, 15) and by motivations (vv. 18, 22). The neighbor-especially the neighbor in need-lives in a world governed not by the ruthless “iron law” of the market or by the

⁶¹ Ronald L. Johnstone, *Religion and Society In Interaction: The Sociology of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1975), 241.

unencumbered autonomy of the powerful, but by the same God who curbed Pharaoh.⁶²

Being impoverished is not a cause of shame. Rather, the needy are tools of God used to test those whom He has blessed with varying degrees of wealth.

The oppression of poverty offers little hope to the poor unless the Church takes on a helpful role. Poverty goes so deep into the social structure that it finds itself in almost every class, clan and family structure including religious life. Hans-Joachim Kraus states, “The essential feature of this situation of ‘poverty’ is the attack of hostile forces and the resulting state of helplessness and need.”⁶³ He continues, “The ‘poor’ are those without bread (Ps 132:15), those who have been robbed (Isa 3:14), those without land or possessions, the dispossessed, the strangers.”⁶⁴ The poor are always with us (Matt 26:11; Mark 14:7, John 12:8). The Church must, therefore, reach beyond the exclusion and marginalization from society and include every member of the community.

God instructs us to act compassionately in Ps 82:3-4: “Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute, rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.” God’s concern for humanity is apparent in Prov 22:2 and 9: “The rich and the poor have this in common: the Lord is the maker of them all.... Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor.” Compassion for others in need is an outward manifestation of God’s mercy and grace. As we compassionately reach the poor, we share Christ with the world.

⁶² Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 240-41.

⁶³ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of Psalms* (trans. Keith Crim; A Continental Commentary; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1992), 151.

⁶⁴ Kraus, *Theology of Psalms*, 152.

As Schaff states, “The old Roman world was a world without charity. Julian the Apostate, who was educated a Christian, tried to engraft charity upon heathenism, but in vain. The idea of the infinite value of each human soul, even the poorest and humblest, was wanting, and with it the basis for future charity.”⁶⁵ A world without charity is a cold heartless place. While it is sometimes uncomfortable to open one’s arms to others, the Church should never leave the poor lacking; God will bless the charitable. Furthermore, love turns a rebellious heart into a receptive one. Schaff asserts, “Christianity insists on love as the highest duty and virtue, which itself inwardly levels social distinctions; and it addresses the comfort and consolation of the gospel particularly to all the poor, the persecuted, and the oppressed.”⁶⁶

People rightfully use the title “neighbor” in relation to ministering to others. Yet Church members may be irritated by the poor or homeless as they leave their comfort zones and come into contact with them. For many, it is difficult to express love. As Berkhof states, his neighbor is “the person who stands in my way, who irritates me by his animosity or who appeals to me by his need for help.”⁶⁷ The Church too often does not want to be bothered or disturbed by social outcasts. This is one of the biggest sins of the western Church today.

⁶⁵ Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Christianity: From the Death of John the Baptist to Constantine the Great, A.D. 100-325*. (vol. 2 of *History of the Christian Church*; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006), 373.

⁶⁶ Schaff, *History*, 1: 446

⁶⁷ Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, 461.

REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION

My faith in Christ gives me the opportunity to reach out to those in need. A challenge, of course, is determining their needs without the influence of my own prejudices. My faith in Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit tell me, however, to persevere. I took this emotional risk with single parent families because I believe that these families are calling to people of faith for help. It was a risk, however, because failing is painful, and discovering that I could relate to these people more than I first thought, might have proven disturbing. Furthermore, my actions might have somehow added to the problems of this vulnerable group rather than to have alleviated them.

As I think about my own faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, I know there is room for others in the Church. I can offer to stand alongside single parents and their children as they suffer grief and loss. I can offer them comfort, understanding, and love in the name of Jesus. They may choose not to join our Church, but I can help pave the way for them if they do. I know that Church involvement opens issues like race, sexual orientation, and sexual sin, but the Gospel is for all who call upon Jesus and sinners can repent. Faith changes all, and my faith tells me to continue to be ready for the wonderful benefits promised to the faithful.

As the Church acts in love, it breaks through barriers that have been in place for decades. In our modern world, the Church must be an agent of change, taking risks, and meeting the needs of our struggling neighbors. Barriers such as race, color, pride, and selfishness keep the Church from reaching the world and its potential. Through God's love aimed at single parent families, these barriers fall and healing occurs.

The Bible shows that God's compassion and mercy are for anyone who calls in faith. The stories of Jesus, Jonah, and the widows are indicative of God's capacity for compassion for an oppressed, and perhaps undeserving world. In Isaiah, furthermore, we are assured that any of the faithful, regardless of status, is included in God's community.

People today are in dire need of God's love and it remains elusive for many. Yet Christians have the freedom and ample opportunity to exhibit love just as Jesus did. People can experience a deep and abiding relationship with God, as God's love acts as a catalyst to change hearts, souls, and minds. This love allows an awareness of the Kingdom of God, leading the Christian out of his comfort zone and into God's servitude.

CHAPTER THREE PROJECT EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

On Saturday, May 2, 2009, Fun Day turned out to be a successful, family-oriented ministry opportunity that was enjoyed by volunteers and participants alike. Research, training, discussions, and planning sessions proved to be valuable tools for the ministry team and helped create in them a sense of anticipation. The concentrated preparation turned out a skilled team that welcomed participants warmly. As people gathered in the morning, meaningful interaction between the participants and the ministry volunteers foretold of the day's success. Despite concerns that the event would need to be postponed because of scheduling conflicts and poor weather, the event went off with few problems and was a great learning and social experience for all.

PREPARATION

Members of the ministry team were recruited from the congregation of Aaron's Creek Baptist Church to become empowered leaders. Innovative training helped the group become a structured and cohesive ministry team that would greet and lead participants in seminar sessions throughout the day. Taking on leadership roles was

challenging for three of the twenty-one volunteers, who were shy and had planned to participate in behind-the-scenes activities. Over the weeks of training, however, it became clear that these volunteers could contribute a wealth of information to the group as well as provide active, visible, leadership roles in executing Fun Day. Thus, these team members were encouraged to become seminar leaders. Interactive training and additional reading provided these individuals the confidence they needed to do new and refreshing things in this ministry. It was exciting to see these usually quiet individuals become effective leaders.

In the training sessions, volunteers shared their thoughts and information. Relevant issues and hypothetical situations were addressed in these sessions, which helped prepare the group to minister on Fun Day. The volunteers discussed the need to make all participants feel welcome, particularly addressing minority groups and other “outsiders.” Anticipating the volunteer pool to be predominately white and female, the group made plans that ensured the males and minority participants would feel welcome.

The core group members accepted responsibility and were flexible and teachable, stepping out of their comfort zones to be active ministers. The group quickly realized that sincerity was most important in connecting with single parent families, and because of that realization, conversation between the volunteers and participants flourished.

Being able to make participants feel welcome was a challenge with personal and institutional implications. The volunteers, trying to break into a new ministry, rose to the challenge and learned to interact with people of different races and cultures. History of prejudice within the church and personally experienced was discussed without hesitation.

Sundays' sermons as seen at Appendix 3, began March 29 and ended May 3, 2009 and were intended to awaken the church to the full potential of compassionate Christians in a difficult world. These sermons' principles were applied and discussed in training sessions on Sunday evenings. Team members became better able to use their personalities, talents, and time for this event by making themselves available to the Southside community as they increased their personal skills throughout the training leading up to Fun Day. By later applying Scripture in their efforts, team members encouraged participants to share their personal stories. As the ministry team led participants through Fun Day activities, volunteers themselves were led by biblical principles in gaining insight into the participants' lives.

Love, understanding, and family values were topics of conversation during each training session, where members were reminded that Jesus' ministry required patience, perseverance, and compassion. As Fun Day was designed to drive the church to reach out to an often-overlooked group, training for Fun Day was meant to help volunteers and the congregation realize that all of humanity share common burdens, and that the Church and individuals have the responsibility to communicate God's loving nature to humanity.

The six training sessions which began on March 29 and ended on May 3, 2009 enriched an outsider's understanding of the single parent family and prepared volunteers to be responsive (Plans at Appendix 4). Each session began with a biblical example of compassion and a discussion of its application in the modern world. During the first session, an examination of the Good Samaritan evolved into a discussion on how to aid the spiritually wounded. Biblical stories involving vulnerable groups prompted a discussion of how to make people feel wanted and accepted into the Aaron's Creek

community. This and subsequent training sessions ended with brainstorming aimed to improve plans for the event.

During the second training session, team members learned of the characteristics of the single parent family. Topics such as death, divorce, unwed motherhood, finances, depression, and emotional health were discussed with a great deal of input from the single parents in the core group. Children's needs were also discussed, as youth volunteers contributed their own feelings and experiences related to self-worth, acceptance, and integration in society. Teachers in the group helped train others to spot a child's special needs.

Week three's training was enhanced by the participation of two local social workers who were invited to speak. The social workers helped to put into perspective the lifestyle changes that occur when a family transitions from a two parent household to a single parent household. A discussion about separation anxiety and feelings of loss and grief were enhanced by input from the widowed members of the team. The discussion eventually led to proposed suggestions that would help the single parent find comfort and acceptance in this stage of life. The social workers helped the team focus on teaching about lifestyle decisions, training for job selection interviews, and sharing coping skills, as well as spiritual leadership through the church. Two of our single parent volunteers shared their own experiences.

During the fourth session, methods of ministering to invitees were discussed. Two single mothers volunteered their time to train the group in an effective ministry strategy as they shared insight on topics such as pain, fear, and anger management, spousal abuse, and family celebrations. These volunteers stressed that single parents need a sounding

board as much as anything else. The seminar topics “Time Management,” Managing Your Dollar,” and “The Right Time to Speak to Your Children about Sex” were evaluated. The ministry group was divided into smaller teams and the plans for ministry were finalized. The group also participated in a special prayer that helped build the team’s confidence and reminded the team that this ministry was a calling from God.

During the fifth session, evaluation, role play, and discussion were conducted. Role playing prepared the group to welcome and interact with participants. Volunteers shared their personal hopes and goals for Fun Day in this training session. Rooms were assigned, facilities were set up, last minute plans were made, and holes in the planning were filled. When the group realized that signs were needed to direct participants to each session, the younger volunteers created and posted the new signs.

Week six May 3, 2009 was the post-Fun Day meeting. Questionnaires were used to quantify the evaluation, but a great deal of time was spent in group discussion. The team was excited and willing to discuss ministry improvements and modifications for future Fun Days and ministering to other disadvantaged groups in the area.

The ministry team consisted of twenty-one Christians from Aaron’s Creek Church, seventeen of whom were females. Eight members had not participated in mission work prior to Fun Day planning, which is a very large percentage of the team. The new team members were five youth and three single mothers who had not had prior opportunities or motivation to participate. The group consisted of five people under the age of sixteen, three between thirty and forty-two, nine between forty-three and fifty-five, and four between fifty-six and sixty-eight. Inexperience was evident, but the group

encouraged and helped each other, resulting in a close-knit ministry team. (See Appendix 6 for the demographics summaries and questionnaire answers.)

The age group from seventeen to twenty-nine was not represented due to personal commitments. In theory, this age group would have identified with the typical single parent family more quickly. Certainly, the relatively small turn-out for Fun Day might at least be partially explained by the pressing personal commitments that explain this absence within the ministry team.

The ministry team had many hopes for Fun Day. They desired to reach out to these families. They hoped that everyone would experience the moving presence of God while they encouraged participants to gain strength and hope. Volunteers desired to help the single parent families cope better with their emotional, spiritual, and financial needs that are sometimes overwhelming. They saw the need to become more sensitive to the experience of crises in the participants' lives, as the team wanted to extend support and caring to these local families. Emotional and spiritual relief was sought for these parents that might provide them a way to fit God into their families' lives.

Promotion of Fun Day began with brainstorming aimed at speedy, efficient, and effective publication. No similar event in Southside Virginia had ever been conducted. A local newspaper picked up on the novelty of Fun Day and interviewed a member of the team, who described Fun Day planning and relevant dates. Conveniently, the article was published two weeks before Fun Day. Aaron's Creek received a number of phone calls attributable to this article. A public announcement was placed in the local news section of the cable station three weeks before the event, which was targeted to people who do not read the local papers.

Four live radio interviews took place on Thursday mornings before Fun Day. A final interview took place on Fun Day early in the morning. Invitations, flyers, and telephone solicitations were designed to communicate an intimate, friendly message that would attract people to the event.

Most of the supplies for Fun Day were donated, and holding the event in the church building kept the costs low. Using the church facilities had the consequence of easing the stress of set-up and clean-up as well.

FUN DAY EVENT

The Fun Day event took place at Aaron's Creek on May 2, 2009. The core group arrived early and got busy preparing the building for guests.

Relationships were established quickly as participants and volunteers arrived and interacted with each other. The event ministered to all members of the single parent family and time for the children to warm up to volunteers was slotted at the beginning of the event.

The early activities had participants and the team having morning snacks and coffee together. A photo of each family was taken and a print was given to the family before the event ended. The adult program focused on the practical and spiritual needs of single parents. Volunteers and participants were equally accommodating and courteous.

The children's program was geared toward Bible stories and entertainment. Craft projects were planned to supplement biblical teaching, so after each Bible story, a supporting craft and an outside activity were scheduled. The crafts encouraged creativity

and were intended to build confidence. Volunteers encouraged the children and praised them for their finished works and participation.

Seminar topics encouraged participant discussion. Some of the participants had reservations about speaking publicly, but successfully battled their shy natures within the discussion groups. Their willingness to participate in discussions despite their timidity demonstrates the effectiveness of the ministry volunteers in making people feel welcome. At one point a participant said, “I cannot tell the leaders from the participants.” As these two segments of society meshed, the collective resembled one large family.

The car care seminar was intended to prevent unnecessary repair expenses for these single parents. It was well received and allowed dialogue between the participants and the men on our ministry team, all of whom were mechanics. The men vacuumed the autos and cleaned the windows. Car problems and opinions as to their best fixes were explained by the mechanics, and participants left Fun Day with a list of reliable, honest, well-established mechanics in the area.

Scriptural booklets were given to the parents at the Bible sessions. The story of the Good Samaritan seemed to be the most discussed scripture of the day, and was a reference point for volunteers when participants asked, “Why are you doing this?” Volunteers responded, “Because of the love of Jesus and his great compassion for you.” This was a breakthrough in ministry. Communication between the volunteers and participants about the Biblical principles behind the execution of Fun Day was a learning experience for both groups.

By all accounts, the women’s day spa was a success. A Mary Kay consultant from a nearby church gave facials to female volunteers and participants. She shared the goals

of the ministry team and shared its compassion for single parents. She freely gave out facials to participants and the team and avoided hard selling. Everyone had a good time and she sold some product as well. The single mothers appeared to feel at home and accepted the pampering treatment. One participant told the consultant that she felt the compassion of Christ at Fun Day. The consultant then had the opportunity to share her faith with this lady.

Not all participants' addresses and telephone numbers were collected. Some participants stated that it was not anyone's business where they lived. Others did not share their personal information for fear of spousal abuse or harassment from another source. We respected the participants' privacy in this respect. Two participants offered their addresses for future events.

FUN DAY ASSESSMENT

Fun Day was a great success but even in a successful event there are opportunities for improvement. Strengths of the ministry included successful interaction with the participants. The group had spent much of its training learning how to make the participants feel welcome, which was rewarded by positive feedback. Barriers to communication such as race, culture, and color differences seemed to be non-existent. The ministry group felt prepared for the event and the team worked with each other to overcome their fears of failure and shyness. Successful teamwork was evident during Fun Day execution as well, as volunteers jumped in to help the kitchen staff serve lunch.

For assessment purposes, follow-up questionnaires were given to participants and volunteers, which have been useful in preparing subsequent events. See Appendix 6. Many areas for improvement, it was discovered, are easily fixable.

Bible discussion sessions were too short to develop adequately, and so next time, more time will be allotted for them. It was discovered that participants wanted to take part in all the seminars, and did not want to choose between them. Some participants missed part of lunch in order to receive facials. Fun Day was extended to later in the afternoon to accommodate participants, but in the future, either the day's schedule must be longer or the number of seminars will be decreased. (See Appendix 1 for the fun day schedule)

Relevant to the number of participants at Fun Day was the fact that people had a difficult time finding Aaron's Creek. The ministry team concluded that signage for the next event must be increased. Large signs posted and easily seen at relevant intersections would have increased participation in Fun Day.

Fun Day weekend was a busy one in the region. The Heritage Festival in South Boston, Virginia may have kept invitees from attending. It was discovered late in planning that opening ceremonies for summer youth baseball also conflicted with Fun Day. Several families came and left early for opening ceremonies.

Distance made it hard for families to participate in Fun Day. Aaron's Creek Church and its facilities are comfortable, but located in a rural area unfamiliar to most. Costs were kept down by using the church facilities, but a building closer to South Boston may have facilitated larger participation. One family arrived late because of inadequate directions and signage to the church, and another had to call for directions.

It has been noted that the weekend is often the time when custody changes from one parent to another. Some participants did not bring their children for this reason, and some non-participants expressed weekend custody as a reason for not attending. They did not want to miss valuable time bonding with their children since their time was limited to the weekend.

Finally, a deficiency in planning existed from a failure to create a backup plan in the case of uncooperative weather. Fortunately, despite the grumbling in the early morning sky, the day turned out to be beautiful.

Questionnaires were designed to provide efficient feedback and consisted of “check the box” choices with space after the questions for supplementation. Feedback was also taken from the discussions that occurred throughout the day. Questionnaires asked non-threatening questions that were meant to provide non-prejudicial, concise, answers. The format of the questionnaires was satisfactory with one exception. The participants’ questionnaire ended with a request for suggestions for improvements. This question was written on the back of the two-page questionnaire and was not answered by participants. However appropriate this question for the poll, if it is not answered, it is probably useless. The researcher cannot guess whether the participants had not noticed the question or whether they simply had no suggestions for future events that had not already been stated aloud. (See Appendix 6)

Fun Day’s questionnaires can be further enhanced for future ministries by asking more short answer follow-up questions. Questions will be less ambiguous, as some of the wording in these participant questionnaires tended to be terms that could be interpreted in several ways. It is apparent from the answers provided that words like love, ministry,

spirituality, and mission should have been defined or the questions needed to be rewritten. Considering the time demands on the single parent, however, I would continue to provide concise questionnaires to encourage participation.

The follow-up questionnaire for the participants was productive in helping the team to prepare for future missions. The ministry team served seven adult parents represented by five mothers and two fathers. Two participants were divorced, three widowed, and two had never been married. One of the participants was under twenty-six years old. Two participants were between the ages of twenty-six and thirty-five, and four participants were between the ages of thirty-six and forty-seven.

Parents' answers as to what they hoped that their children would get from Fun Day varied and included understanding, friends, relationships, loyalty, cooperation, love, respect, and training. Three participants had been single parents for three years or less, two had been single for between four and six years, and two participants had been single parents for more than six years. Six of these parents claimed to have made personal commitments to Jesus Christ while one had not. Three of these parents were active members of a church while four did not attend any church. (See Appendix 6)

It was observed that Fun Day participants are proud of their parental roles, and their answers to personal interviews and the questionnaires reflect the care and thoughtfulness they use to take care of their families. Questionnaires asked, "What do you expect to gain from this event?" Three participants expected to gain a closer walk with Christ. Four of the parents answered that they wanted social acceptance from the community. Four parents expected a safe Fun Day environment in order to express themselves.

Three parents asked the team to establish a support group in the future, which would facilitate single parents being able to support each other and to function better in society. Through Fun Day discussions, four parents wanted to develop their own self-awareness, which is understandable as single parents have so little time to spend on themselves. Two parents expected to gain new direction, insight or leadership. It was observed that all the parents seemed to be searching for something, whether it was a new role model, spiritual guide, friend, or career path.

All parents agreed that future Fun Day events be held in the winter after December so that the children could benefit from them. No sports activities would compete with Fun Day in January or February. All of the parents said that they would participate in a similar event and that they would invite friends.

It was agreed that the facilities were adequate. Four parents rated Fun Day as well planned, two rated it overly planned, and one said that the event had no thought to planning at all. Some parents suggested that Fun Day be longer and that outdoor activities be available for the adults. These activities might include horseshoes, a scavenger hunt, or basketball. The parents overwhelmingly thought that everyone was friendly, open and sincere, and the volunteers had made them feel special.

The parents were asked how often they consulted God. One said once each day, five said more than once each day, and one said seldom. Six parents said that this event helped with their overall health (emotional, mental, spiritual, social, and/or physical) and one said that Fun Day had no effect on his or her health. All seven participants said that Fun Day helped them cope with feelings of being alone and with rearing their children.

The discussions of loneliness, financial, religious, and social issues helped six parents and one did not benefit at all.

Participants indicated that they felt welcome and that the core group was warm, friendly, and helpful. Participants thought that their struggles were respected with dignity and care. Participants agreed that the facilities were very good and met their needs, while their surroundings were relaxed, enjoyable, and filled with acceptance. Providing an accepting, enjoyable environment was one of the goals to which the team aspired, and such an atmosphere was recognized to be an asset in this and future ministries. Participants also expressed appreciation for the church's providing healthy snacks and lunch alternatives for them and their children.

Thirteen children attended the event, twelve of whom were girls. Two children were between four and eight years-old, seven children were between nine and twelve, and three children were between thirteen and seventeen. Ten of these children reportedly attended church. Eleven had heard of the story of Jesus. Twelve were excited about coming to Fun Day and one had not been excited at all.

Ten children reported that they had attended a "fun day" in the past. When asked what they liked best, four children said they liked the craft projects, six liked the Bible stories, seven liked the games, and two liked the food. Twelve said that they would come again to this event while one answered maybe. All of these children felt well treated and cared for.

The children had different expectations of "Fun Day" than their parents. Their answers indicated that they wanted their nails and faces done, more games, swimming, a water slide, to be 'helpers' and to teach a children's class. The children liked the

volunteers, and everything about Fun Day except that the day was too short. In the future, activities will be adjusted to be more appealing to the children.

The ministry team's follow-up session and discussions were enlightening. All twenty-one of the ministry volunteers said they had adequate time to prepare for their seminar presentations. They agreed that the materials and instructions were user friendly and were helpful in understanding the single parent family.

The ministry volunteers felt they were successful in interacting with the participants and in developing limited relationships with them. The ministry team provided the participants a list of their telephone numbers to call them in a crisis. Some of the participants were already friends and clients of the team members, and the already-established relationships between them strengthened. The ministry team agreed that they needed more time to discuss the topics, and that they would like to lengthen the seminars to accommodate the participants for the next Fun Day. Four volunteers said that more time was needed for the Bible search and discussion. Seventeen volunteers said that God was leading the discussions with the participants.

The ministry team agreed that they fulfilled their group expectations for the event. They knew that God controlled all situations during the event, and through their efforts and God's will, believe that bridges of hope and direction have been built in the community. They took advantage of a local ministry opportunity through hospitality, which is a special key to this team's effectiveness. It would have been a worthwhile event even if only one person had shown up that day, yet the team's efforts have resulted in new church membership, as three of the seven participant families have started attending Aaron's Creek.

The mission team's increased awareness has led to a realization that the team is capable of making a difference in people's lives. The training helped team members tremendously, as they were encouraged to delve into the relevant issues. During training, the team experienced the simplicity of the Gospel as they relied upon God for direction and leadership.

The team decided to change the name to Family Fun Fest and that future events should not be confined to single parent families. The ministry team concluded that Fun Day needed to be planned in the winter or very early in the spring before sports events begin and before the demands on families grow in the summer. There needed to be similar events for the widows, special needs children and adults, and Native Americans.

Unexpected insight came from team member observations. As the core group became a team, members saw and nurtured the talents within each other. Members were excited to observe each other, learn about themselves, and encourage each other to overcome their shyness and prejudices in order to minister to others. Three team members moved from being shy support members to outstanding session leaders because of the encouragement of other team members. Team members perceived themselves as having improved their ability to instruct others, as their beginning and ending questionnaires show. See Appendix 7 for a summary of the team's before and after self-evaluations.

Out of this ministry, participants suggested that there be future Fun Days, and stated that they would invite friends who would benefit from the Bible discussions and the seminars. More surprising to the team, however, was the request from the participants for an ongoing support group for single parent families in the area. The team

welcomed the opportunity to make plans for it. Another suggestion came from a team member which involved invitations to the church's once-a-month family night meal. Participants commented positively about the food and the fact that there were healthy choices for them and their children. Inviting single parent families to this event once a month would help keep costs low while providing the opportunity to interact with these new-found friends on a regular basis.

POST-FUN DAY MINISTRY AND DISCOVERY

Due to this successful ministry opportunity, the team members are planning other missions. A Widows Fun Day is scheduled for the spring of 2010, which will largely follow Fun Day's format. Training will consist of studying topics relevant to widows and appealing to their needs and sensibilities. The group is currently developing a plan and training sessions for the event.

The group has better defined its goals for fulfilling the needs of specific groups of people. Not only is the team developing a single parent family support group in conjunction with the Dan River Baptist Association, it is taking its efforts out-of-state as well. Fifteen members of the ministry group conducted a missionary trip to Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North Dakota to present a carnival for the local children in July, 2009. Carnival activities included face painting, a bubble blowing contest, refreshments including popcorn and snow cones, a ring toss game, two inflatable play rooms, and a clown show. This carnival functioned to enlist children in an upcoming Vacation Bible School.

COMMENTARY

AARON'S CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH

Prior to Fun Day planning, Aaron's Creek was open to ministry opportunities. The church funded mission trips, participated in outreach programs, and church leaders agreed to promote Fun Day in order to reach single parent families in the community. During the project, I observed a ministry team whose members were open and compassionate. They worked together as they invited outsiders into the church.

But during this time another group within the congregation formed. This group exhibited open hostility toward change and toward anyone who was not born, reared, and married into the church congregation or community. This group openly was against Fun Day planning and did not want to use church funds and resources for this project. Needless to say, the group refused to participate in executing Fun Day.

As I attempted to reason with this group and its members, I continued my sermon plans. I was unsuccessful in changing this group's opinions, but was successful in getting from them that their problems came from culture and race issues.

Through education, some of these people could open their hearts and church to outsiders. A study in American history, Christian history, and American culture and social statistics could influence younger generations to drop their familial baggage. With the older congregation, however, sheer stubbornness will probably prevent their wanting to accept anything other than what they have known all their lives, no matter how plain

the evidence. But just as heaven-worthiness does not depend upon culture or social status, God's ability to change even the most stubborn heart is pervasive and beyond our understanding. Anything is possible.

I have responded to church animosity by taking many positive steps. I have had a "town meeting" with these and other church members and discussed this spirit-suffocating problem. In this meeting, we discussed the causes of the animosity and whether the condition could be rectified. A Christian counselor was commissioned to teach a "wholeness" seminar to help people recognize this malady. This seminar taught that forgiveness and healing begins when people listen to one another. I tried to teach the congregation that their enemy is not people, but Satan, as I led a study entitled "Overcoming the Enemy." This study highlighted the fact that the enemy destroys the fellowship within a church.

I scheduled a meeting with the church's "spiritual leaders" to pray, talk, and arrive at some basic conclusions to rectify this situation. These meetings were intended to enable the congregation to once again function as normally as possible. I called in a mediator to facilitate reconciliation. Ultimately, however, while my efforts have made apparent the spiritual deficiencies of the congregation, they have not cured them. It is sorry to say, but the people focus upon themselves and ignore God's principles and commands.

Following the project, I observed myself and the rest of the ministry team excited about future ministry opportunities and looking for ways to reach disadvantaged groups. As pleased as I was to observe its proactive approach, I was equally disappointed to observe that hostile church leaders felt threatened by the changing church dynamic.

Despite the hostiles' efforts, though, the ministry team raised \$12,000 to cover the cost of the ministry to North Dakota.

The mission team is a standing committee at Aaron's Creek and everyone is invited and encouraged to participate in mission trips. However, after three months of praying and planning this trip, several key church members remained unaware of it due to their lack of participation in Sunday services. The mission team asked for help with airfare to the mission field. Church leadership was against this, but eventually Aaron's Creek did cover the airfare and allowed the team to conduct fundraisers, which resulted in collecting \$12,000. In North Dakota, we were pleased to find that the money went much further than we anticipated and the team was able to provide two local congregations \$1,500 each. After coming home, the mission team reimbursed the church for the airfare and even had money to give to the local state mission offering.

As a result of the efforts expended in the North Dakota mission, a hostile takeover of leadership occurred within the church. A politically powerful family started blocking mission programs by calling in members who had not attended church in years. Eventually, this family spearheaded an election that displaced three deacons of the Board. This action has devastated and horrified many at Aaron's Creek. The majority of the remaining church leaders have become tired of the politics and have said that they will move to another church.

The ministry project to North Dakota was not as successful as it could have been. Certainly, the church had the resources to contribute to it. While preparing for Fun Day, I had hoped that making the congregation aware of the plight of disadvantaged groups would help bring the church together and that the entire congregation would step up to

the plate. I gladly note that the ministry team rose to every challenge, but sadly and unexpectedly, the entire congregation did not. The self-centered nature of the church leadership has created great tension in the congregation.

Institutional politics is imbedded at Aaron's Creek. Founding families within the church are terrified of losing power. This fear, however, will be the downfall of the church unless the congregation gives up its pride and relents to God. The church needs the community even more than the community needs it. As the church shares its vast resources with a community in need, it saves itself in the temporal world and in the hereafter.

I have had occasional successes with church members and leaders regarding their long-standing prejudices and dispositions. These successes, however, are few and far between. I suppose that I struggle with the fact that not everyone takes as seriously the commitment to Christ as I do and I realize that not everyone shares my passion. After all, I owe my life and soul to God. I take seriously my decision to promote the kingdom of Christ in our world and thus I am stunned by my findings about Aaron's Creek Baptist Church.

Observation, interaction, self-motivation and teamwork, and otherwise trying to meet the needs of the less blessed remain only part of ministry. The other part is the realization that the team is doing the work through and for our Savior Jesus Christ, which is not about politics or race at all. Realization of this truth motivates and challenges this ministry team to continue reaching out to the world.

OVERALL IMPRESSIONS AND PERSONAL REFLECTION

Seeing the interaction between the participants and volunteers gave me a better understanding of Christ's compassion. As the team served diverse members of the local community, it met the challenges of the Great Commission and became resolved in developing services in the future. Wisely, the team realizes that the Great Commission does not stop with Fun Day, but continues into perpetuity.

Prayer and training prepared the team to offer compassion in God's name. Teamwork strengthened the relationships between team members and encouraged persistence and functionality. The team thoughtfully recognized personal needs within the group and made concerted efforts to address those needs.

Proof of the team's effectiveness and commitment are evident in changing from a project approach from a committee style to a team style. Through new classes in the Sunday school department, leaders developed volunteers who were confident and competent to lead in breakout sessions during the event. The choir developed three praise teams that introduced services to the congregation. Through the confidence of ministry volunteers, with their use of contemporary music, the overall worship services became more enjoyable and uplifting for the congregation.

Past experience in counseling prepared me to observe the interaction between participants and leaders. I observed that conversation tended to start slowly, but common interests drew people together. Sincere, amiable, and deep conversation occurred when people allowed themselves to be vulnerable with each other. Leaders and participants both experienced personal growth and received the support of the collective.

In the past, I have experienced difficulty in comfortably delegating tasks to others. These training sessions, however, helped me trust the group leaders and delegate tasks with ease, which allowed the event to take on the personality of the team and not myself. This newfound trust allowed team members to freely express themselves and allowed me to observe objectively and effectively. Thankfully, people who are already committed to a project are ready, willing, and able to perform, and the ministry team was no exception. With a little direction from me, the team did a great job and allowed me to do my own more effectively.

Observing the group reminded me that each person experiences God in a different manner. Some will hear a still, small voice, while others will experience a simple feeling. How people respond depends upon their motivations, personalities, and circumstances. Some people reflect and meditate about their relationship with God, while others speak and act. Leaders remained flexible and allowed God to speak personally to each participant.

I remain convinced that God's house is a house for anyone willing to enter. God knows our struggles and helps us to handle them. Seeing the hardships of these and other single parent families has given me a renewed sense of appreciation for their challenging circumstances. I listened to one participant mother expressing her frustrations and feelings of inadequacy, while the participant fathers expressed the need for an ongoing support group. As I talked to Fun Day participants, I was reminded of the struggles of those single parents of my youth. If they had had a support group, they could have helped each other a great deal. And had they had the support of their local community, their burdens would have been lessened considerably.

By focusing on prayer and training, the team acted compassionately towards each other and the participants. Team work made the day successful as relationships developed. The ministry team became a more persistent and effective unit that promoted a sense of community. Fun Day planning and execution opened avenues of mission opportunity that emboldened the team in their faith.

How to interact with one another is a learned skill which requires relearning for each new contact. It takes time to become comfortable with new people. I observed this during Fun Day and have observed this phenomenon in the past. Regardless, I had to remind myself to be patient during Fun Day while everyone was getting to know one another. I must constantly remind myself that my “passion for Christ” is not the same as other individuals, nor is it expressed the same way. Patience, as they say, is a virtue, and I had to constantly check myself to avoid becoming frustrated by what I initially and wrongfully perceived to be inaction by the ministry team in the beginning hours of Fun Day.

As a coach, the pastor leads the team so that all members see themselves as equally valuable to the community of faith. Through coaching and by ignoring institutional politics, church improvement and conflict resolution are possible. As the pastor encourages his congregation, some church members achieve breakthrough, yet as I have found, the entire congregation refused to be affected. I wrestle with factors that negatively affect the church like the power struggles and political factions within, cultural isolationism, racism, and hypocrisy. I anticipate I will always struggle with these issues. I will continue to pray, study, and become more sensitive to the needs of others within the congregation and community. These issues might always be evident, especially in church

communities similar to Aaron's Creek, but discussing them will promote a healthier congregation and pastor. These discussions can bring to light the divide between who we are and what we strive, or should strive, to be.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Surprised, pleased, and disappointed by my findings about Aaron's Creek, I see a new direction. I see a small group of people really encouraged by the effect they had on others. I have seen positive responses in the church that have been made weak by the negativity from church leadership and a significant portion of the congregation.

We all need a Savior and salvation, and God has provided that to us through Jesus Christ. Overcoming the demands that are put on culture may be a step in the right direction concerning true acceptance within the kingdom of Christ.

Ministry continues to get more difficult in society. We have so much competition and people are always looking for a quick fix in life. More and more people are opting to live their lives without God's principles and guidelines. The key to combating this apathy and rejection, I believe, is the method in which the church ministers. We must change it without losing the message of the cross of Christ. Even at the expense of personal power, ministry must continue so that the world will know of a loving Savior, Jesus Christ.

I wrestle with issues within the church like power struggles, political and family factions, race relations, hypocrisy, and popularity contests. I expect I will always struggle with these issues, but I have come to realize that it is not about these struggles at all, it is all about Jesus.

Fun Day was by all accounts a success and a learning experience. As a result of the preparation and execution of Fun Day, Aaron's Creek Baptist Church has become more aware of the needs of the local community. The single parent families who attended the event enjoyed themselves and left with a wealth of resources and information. Their positive feedback increased ministry confidence and provided the momentum for further carrying out of the Great Commission.

APPENDIX 1 FUN DAY SCHEDULE

Event took place at Aaron's Creek Baptist Church
Saturday, May 2nd 9:00 AM- 2:00 PM

Adult Ministry Plan:

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 9:00-9:45 | Light Breakfast Refreshments
Devotional Thought
Welcome and Introduction of Program and Participants
Led by the Ministry Core Group |
| 9:45-10:45 | Seminar Session One
Choose One (from list below)
Led by Ministry Core Group |
| 10:45-11:00 | Break and Beverages |
| 11:00-12:00 | Seminar Session Two
Choose One (from list below)
Led by Ministry Core Group |
| 12:00-12:45 | Lunch
Ministry Core Group will share information about our church activities
and programs during the lunch time. |
| 12:45-1:45 | Seminar Session Three
Choose One (from list below)
Led by Ministry Core Group |
| 1:45-2:00 | Door Prizes |

Seminar Choices: (participants chose three from this list)

1. Compassion and Discipline for My Children.
2. Grief/ Loss/ Coping: (Time Management, Budgeting, Being Alone).

3. Finding Me Again [Open Directed Discussion: Who Am I Now.].
4. Pamper Yourself.
5. Bible Search Discussion/Applications.(Luke 10:25-37; John 11:23-44; Acts 9:36-43)

Door prizes for the adults included haircuts, oil changes, manicures, dental needs, books, DVDs, grocery vouchers, restaurant gift cards, baby sitting services for children and other merchant gift cards.

Children's Ministry Plan:

This was a time for children in the group to have fun, and learn about Jesus and become acquainted with our church. The children's program was led by our Girls in Action, and Acteens groups with the assistance from adult members of the ministry team. The children were with the parents for the welcome and lunch.

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 9:45-10:45 | Bible Story Time: Session One.
Including: Story, Activities, Games and Crafts. |
| 10:45-11:00 | Mid-morning Snack. |
| 11:00-12:00 | Recreation.
Including several recreation stations like: swings, organized games and inflatable games. |
| 12:45-1:30 | Bible Story Time: Session Two.
Including: Story, Activities, Games and Crafts. |
| 1:30-2:00 | Door Prizes |

Door prizes for the children included markers, crayons, paper, books, DVDs, restaurant gift cards and other merchant gift cards. We provided prizes for each participant.

APPENDIX 2

FUN DAY RESOURCES

The following websites provide statistical and practical information on and for the American family and provide a jumping point for research and developing ministry approaches. Further resources are listed in the Bibliography.

National Commission on Children. *Just the Facts; A Summary of Recent Information on America's Children and their Families.*

www.Fathers.com/content/index.php?option=com-content&task=view&id=391

Parents Without Partners, International website. "Facts About Single Parent Families."

<http://www.parentswithoutpartners.org/support1.htm>

Families.com. <http://www.families.com>. Covers many topics of interest, discounts, coupons

Fathers.com. <http://www.Fathers.com>. Website provides resources and information for fathers of any marital status.

Fresh Start What's Next. <http://whatsnextfreshstart.org>. "a mission project that churches... should ...implement to encourage single mothers and their children... a very detailed, well written and dynamic program..."

B.E.T.T.H.E.L. Ministries. <http://bethelcares.org>. "... Devoted to the life advancement of women and children."

211 Virginia. <http://www.211virginia.org>. Helps with social services in Virginia.

Montana State University Extension. <http://www.msuextension.org>. Provides resources for 4-H activities.

APPENDIX 3

SERMON SUMMARIES

Week 1 Sermon: Deepening Our Faith in Missions (Luke 24:1-12)

Our faith deepens through God's eternal and holy compassion. No one really deserves God's free flowing compassion. As the church is called to deeper faith, it will share the compassion of God. We deepen our faith and compassion toward others, as we believe in Christ. We believe that God has a plan to share his compassion to those who have been isolated and are labeled as outcasts in society. God's purpose for the church is to wrap his arms of compassion around the members of the community of faith so that they can do the same for a lost world. God's power and presence is realized through his compassion as Christians share the love of Christ. As the church deepens its faith and service in missions, it discovers that its compassion broadens toward all people. God has promised to meet our needs according to his riches. He continues to pour his loving compassion on all people. The people in our community need and desire the compassion of God. God accepts the church through his compassion and the church too must accept those who are different into the family of God. Through the resurrection of Christ, we have eternal life. This true, free, and eternal life offers us living hope which we in turn offer to the world. People need the true compassion of God. The compassion of God within the church brings on new ministries, directions, and a more compassionate fellowship. If the church is to win the world, then it must share this free and flowing compassion of God with all people.

Week 2 Sermon: A Gathering Place for All People (Isaiah 56: 1-8)

A refuge, fortress, and safe haven gives us a sense of safety. We are thrust from place to place only to feel heartache and pain. The church today must open its doors of compassion and invite all people into God's gathering place. When the church has a heart for people, it will exercise its true compassion and accept, receive, and welcome everyone into the house of God. There may be people who do not fit into our preconceived idea of a member of the community of faith. We must allow Jesus to tear down walls and barriers in order for the church to share true compassion. Through God's compassion, we can open the doors of the house of God to all people. God's kingdom is for all who desire to accept Christ by faith. There will always be people who are different from us in our world and community. The church must overlook the barriers of race, marital status, and economic separation that have been placed in society and exercise the free flowing gift of God's compassion. If the church misses the opportunity to become more compassionate, I fear that we may lose the next generation. God's compassion knows no boundaries or walls. The kingdom of heaven knows no male or female, black or white, bond or free, Jew or Greek. God's house should become a gathering place for all people. Through our assembly together, God's compassion can be shared with all people.

Week 3 Sermon: Becoming Fishers of Men (Luke 5:1-11)

Fishing is a big sport in our area. Without the special rod, reel, bait, tackle, and the perfect spot in the lake, one cannot catch the big fish. In order to catch the big fish, one must have a passion for fishing and great patience. The church today must have a

passion for compassion. In order for the church to catch “the big one” for the kingdom of God, it must launch out into the deep waters of life and be patient to allow God to bring results. Using and sharing the compassion of God will enable the church to bring people into the kingdom of God. We must have the compassion of God in order to make a difference in our community. It is the church’s duty to express the compassion of God to those who have been isolated, neglected or rejected. God’s compassion is deep, wide, and fulfills all our needs. The church must stretch out its arms of compassion and prepare to share God’s love with the community. As we reach out with compassion, others will know that we care and God’s kingdom will be realized.

Week 4 Sermon: As We Are Already Going. . . (Matthew 28:11-20)

Jesus appoints his disciples to go into the world with the gospel. Today, the church is also appointed to go into the world. We are to go with a vision to communicate God’s abundant compassion. Without the compassion of God, there is no hope for the future. This mandate that has been given to the people of God brings us to the reality, that without the compassion of God, people cannot change their lives or eternal future. God reassures his people that they can reach the masses of hurting, starving, isolated, and neglected people. The church can only reach the needs of the world through the compassion of God. God can reach those who so desperately need a caring, understanding, compassionate, and accepting heart through a loving compassionate community of faith. The heart of God’s people must share God’s compassion that is available to everyone. Does our church have a passion to share Jesus with others? We must examine ourselves. Do we need to redirect our efforts to show more compassion?

There are millions calling for true compassion. Are we going to be silent and do nothing about those people? Answer the call from God! As we are already going, we must become the compassionate people of God so that his love is shown to the world.

Week 5 Sermon: A Mission That Is Possible (Jonah 3:5-4:3)

Jonah wanted to die; he was defeated. He loathed the Assyrians. God uses many people in spite of themselves. Jonah fled from God. He heard God's word three times about preaching. Jonah had wanted the Ninevites destroyed. Jonah had several things that made his mission impossible turn into a mission that is possible. Jonah did not have any compassion for the Assyrians. He thought that God only had compassion for him and people like him. He did not want God's compassion to be shared with the Assyrians. Jonah was a gifted prophet but like us he sinned. Jonah was stubborn and wanted his own way, but God had other plans. Jonah was very selfish and looked out only for himself. God spoke to Jonah in a very astounding way. In the belly of a big fish, Jonah finally realized God's compassion. He realized that God's compassion is free to anyone who believes in faith. God gives Ninevah a second chance to repent. The people repented and God, through his compassion, spared the Ninevites. God accepted their repentant attitudes, actions, and broken hearts. These people of Ninevah were broken, alone, ignorant, and wandering. In the beginning, Jonah did not give the Ninevites a second chance. He could not even give them pity. God poured out his compassion on these people. Can God use us in spite of our sins? Yes he can, and he does. He used Jonah and he can use us. We have a great task as we share the compassion of God. Countless people

are searching for compassion, acceptance, and a place of peace. The church must respond by meeting the needs of the people and expressing the awesome compassion of God.

Week 6 Sermon: We Have an Awesome Responsibility (2 Timothy 3:14-4:5)

We have an awesome responsibility to live out the compassion of God daily. When we accept God's love and grace, then we must share his compassion with others. We must take all we have learned and offer the gift of the compassion of God. Do we take a risk today and love others that are different? If we truly love the Lord, then we must invest in the ministry of compassion. The church today must take a risk, after all, we have all sinned and need God's forgiveness. The assurance that Christians have is the unending love of God. Our greatest resources belong to God and are free to all people. We have this eternal responsibility to pour out the compassion of God to the world. We share God's compassion as we preach, teach, feed those who are in need, and lead others to the spiritual kingdom through Christ. As God's servants, we must share his love. We must reach out of our comfort zone and allow others to see God's love at work in our lives and hearts. We must share the compassion of God as if we have never done so before. This compassion will meet the needs of all who are struggling and who need assistance through the church. Through our love and strong commitment, we can spread the compassion of God to all who are hurting, lonely, or isolated.

APPENDIX 4

CORE GROUP TRAINING PLANS

Six weeks of training sessions was required for the event including a follow up session.

Training took place on Sunday evenings at 7 PM, March 29 to May 3, 2009 at Aaron's Creek Baptist Church. Twenty-one ministry servants, most adults, implemented this fun day and attended training.

TRAINING TOPICS AND THEMES

1. THE GIFT OF COMPASSION:
 - A. Defining God's Compassion: Biblical / Modern Day Compassion.
 - B. Looking at the Good Samaritan: Luke 10: 25-37.
 - C. Identifying Vulnerable Groups Who Desperately Need Compassion Today.
Deuteronomy 14: 28-29; 24:19-21; Psalm 145: 7-9; Jonah 4:2; Acts 6: 1-7.
 - D. Preliminary Planning and Brainstorming For the Fun Day Event.
2. UNDERSTANDING THE ONE- PARENT FAMILY
 - A. Physical Loss: Death / Divorce / Unwed.
Lazarus; John 11: 23-44; Widows Son; I Kings 17: 17-24; Luke 7: 11-15; Jairus Daughter; Matthew 9:23-25; Dorcas Restored; Acts 9:36-43.
 - B. Readjusting Finances: A Hard Reality of Life Now.
 - C. Childrens' Needs: Self-worth, Acceptance, Integration in Society.
Using Frank Minirth's book entitled *Happiness is a Lifestyle: Choosing to Make a Positive Change* Revell: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2005
 - D. Chapter 2: Depression: Pursuing Well Being (Minirth's book).
 - E. Intermediate Planning For the Fun Day Event and Team Assignment.
3. EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF SINGLE PARENTS
 - A. Lifestyle Changes.
 - B. Separation Anxiety.
 - C. Grief /Loss.
 - D. Brainstorm for Open Discussions.

Paul's Life, Mary's Life, Jesus' Life, Woman caught in Adultery & Forgiven, Disciples' life.

E. From Frank Minirth's book: Chapter 7: Loss and Grief: Pursuing Comfort.

F. Planning and Discussion of the Seminars, Adult Team, Children's Team, Publicity Team and Hospitality Team.

4. MINISTERING TO ONE PARENT FAMILIES

A. Introduction to Our Community of Faith (Church).

B. Directory, Ministries, Classes, Constitution, Worship, Mission Opportunities.

C. Assimilation of Families into Our Ministries.

D. Development of Potential Support Groups for Parents and Children.

E. From Frank Minirth's book: Chapter 9: Loneliness: Pursuing Relationships.

F. Division of Responsibilities and Planning for the Fun Day Event.

5. ONE- PARENT FAMILIES AWAITING OUR MINISTRY

A. Evaluate Our Fun Day Activities

B. Discoveries About Ourselves and Others.

C. Assessment of Our Readiness for the Event.

D. From Frank Minirth's book: Chapter 12: Troubled Teens: Pursuing Help.

E. Discussion About What We Would Like to Accomplish Through This Event.

6. FOLLOW UP AND DEBRIEFING WITH MINISTRY SERVANTS.

A. Open Discussion and Assessment by Ministry Servants.

B. What Can We Improve: Adult, Children, Hospitality and Publicity.

C. What Did We Do Well: Adult, Children, Hospitality and Publicity.

D. Did We Exemplify the Compassion of Christ?

E. Future Plans for Another Fun Day Event.

APPENDIX 5 PROJECT CALENDAR

March 19, 2009: Approval from faculty committee to begin project.

March 29, 2009: Week 1: Sunday Night Training 5-7:30pm

Sermon: Deepening Our Faith in Missions (Luke 24:1-12)

THE GIFT OF COMPASSION: Defining God's Compassion; Biblical / Modern Day; The Good Samaritan; Vulnerable Groups. Preliminary planning and brainstorming for the fun day event.

April 5, 2009: Week 2: Sunday Night Training 5-7:30pm: (Dinner after training)

Sermon: A Gathering Place for All People (Isaiah 56: 1-8)

UNDERSTANDING THE SINGLE PARENT FAMILY: Physical Loss; Readjusting Finances; Children's' Needs; Frank Minirth's book entitled *Happiness is a Lifestyle: Choosing to Make a Positive Change* Chapter 2: Depression: Pursuing Well Being Intermediate planning for the fun day event and team assignments.

April 14, 2009: Week 3: Sunday Night Training 5-7:00pm

Sermon: Becoming Fishers of Men (Luke 5:1-11)

EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF SINGLE PARENTS: Lifestyle Changes; Brainstorm for Open Discussions. Frank Minirth's book: Chapter 7: Loss and Grief: Pursuing Comfort. Planning and discussion of the seminars for adult team, children's team, publicity team, and hospitality team. Thursday morning radio interviews begin. Associational newsletter publicity. 100 letters sent to area church congregations.

April 19, 2009: Week 4 Sunday Night Training 5-7:30pm

Sermon: As We Are Already Going. . . (Matthew 28:11-20)

MINISTERING TO SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES: Introduction to our Community of Faith (Church). Directory, Ministries, Classes, Constitution, Worship, Mission opportunities. Minirth's book: Chapter 9: Loneliness: Pursuing Relationships. Dividing responsibilities and planning for the fun day event. Thursday radio interview. Cable announcement of Fun Day. Newspaper coverage of proposed Fun Day Event.

April 26, 2009: Week 5: Sunday Night Training 5-7:00pm

Sermon: A Mission That Is Possible (Jonah 3:5-4:3)

SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES AWAITING OUR MINISTRY: Evaluate Fun Day activities; Discoveries and assess our readiness. Minirth's book: Chapter 12: Troubled Teens: Pursuing Help. Discussion about what we would like to accomplish. Cable announcement and Thursday radio interview. **Fun Day Event May 2:** Radio interview

May 3, 2009: Week 6: Sunday Night Training 4:30-7:30pm

Sermon: We Have an Awesome Responsibility (2 Timothy 3:14-4:5)

FOLLOW UP AND DEBRIEFING WITH MINISTRY SERVANTS: Discussion and assessment by ministry team, What we can improve: What we did well.

Future Fun Days? Did we exemplify the compassion of Christ?

Team appreciation dinner and celebration.

APPENDIX 6 QUESTIONNAIRE DATA

QUESTIONNAIRE (WITH SELECTED ANSWERS) FOR THE ONE-PARENT FAMILY FUN DAY EVENT FOR PROJECT CORE GROUP LEADERS (1)

1. What is your age? Under 16- (5) 17-29- (0) 30-42-(3) 43-55-(9) 56-68-(4)
2. What is your gender? Male- (5) Female-(16)
3. Have you ever been on a church mission trip before? Yes-(13) No-(8)

Please Rate the following: *(Before and After Answers Compiled into Appendix 7)*

	Weak				Strong
Your Missions Involvement.	1	2	3	4	5
Your Missions Giving.	1	2	3	4	5
Your Missions Praying.	1	2	3	4	5
Your Church Participation.	1	2	3	4	5
Your Understanding of One-Parent Families.	1	2	3	4	5
Your Ability to Instruct others in a Church Setting.	1	2	3	4	5
Your General knowledge of Scripture.	1	2	3	4	5

4. What are your hopes and dreams for this ministry experience? (Answers:)
 - a. To reach out and to build relationships with single parent families.
 - b. To meet new people and at the same time meet their needs if possible.
 - c. To encourage through strength and hope through God's presence.
 - d. To develop a better understanding of the single parent family.
 - e. To grow in mission action for the future.
 - f. To become supportive in helping them reach out to Jesus.
 - g. To become more sensitive to the needs of the single parent family.
 - h. To help these families in their need and in their crisis situation.
 - i. To be a bridge of support, concern, and understanding through friendship.
 - j. To help them to see that they are valuable and embrace them with concern.
 - k. To help them to see the importance and trust of the Lord in our world.
 - l. To help them find where Jesus makes a difference in their family.

QUESTIONNAIRE- SELECTED QUESTIONS (WITH SELECTED ANSWERS) FOR
THE ONE-PARENT FAMILY FUN DAY EVENT FOR PROJECT CORE GROUP
LEADERS (2)

Please Rate the following:	Weak					Strong
Your Missions Involvement.	1	2	3	4	5	
Your Missions Giving.	1	2	3	4	5	
Your Missions Praying.	1	2	3	4	5	
Your Church Participation.	1	2	3	4	5	
Your Understanding of One-Parent Families.	1	2	3	4	5	
Your Ability to Instruct others in a Church Setting.	1	2	3	4	5	
Your General Knowledge of Scripture.	1	2	3	4	5	
Rate the Training you received.	1	2	3	4	5	
Rate the Material you received.	1	2	3	4	5	
Rate the effectiveness of the Adult Ministry Team.	1	2	3	4	5	
Rate the effectiveness of the Children's Team.	1	2	3	4	5	
Rate the effectiveness of the Publicity Team.	1	2	3	4	5	
Rate the effectiveness of the Hospitality Team.	1	2	3	4	5	
Rate the Overall One-Parent Family Event.	1	2	3	4	5	

1. Did the sermons during this six week period help you in your ministry involvement?
Yes-(19) No- (2)
2. Did you have ample time to prepare for your seminar presentation? Yes-(21) No-(0)
3. Were the materials and instructions user friendly and helpful to you? Yes-(21) No-(0)
4. In the future, would you be interested in other ministry groups? Yes-(21) No-(0)
5. Did you experience dialogue with the participants? Yes-(21) No-(0)
6. In hindsight, would you have presented your seminar materials differently? Yes-(4)
No-(17) Why or why not? (Answers: Why-- needed more discussion concerning Bible principles, needed to be more available, would liked to have been better prepared; Why not-- This is a simple way for all to understand when adapted to age groups.)
7. Did you fulfill your hopes and dreams for the event? Yes-(21) No-(0) (Comments: it was God controlled; everyone made connections with the participants; everyone took valued materials home, Fun Day provided a local ministry opportunity; hospitality was a special tool of effectiveness; it was a worthwhile event even if only one person would have attended; volunteer prayed and left results to God; seeds of hope were sown; follow-up was rewarding.)
8. Has your missions awareness been changed by this ministry event? Yes-(21) No-(0)
Explain.

Answers:

1. They were involved more with the local community.
2. Training helped them tremendously.
3. I was able to interact with two of the families that attended.
4. Needs in the local community are far more abundant than once thought.
5. This was a great learning experience.
6. This helped me grow in recognizing the needs of others.
7. I was encouraged and enlightened by the needs that I was able to make a difference in.
8. I am more aware now than before about individuals needs.
9. I am excited about helping in another mission opportunity.
10. I know more now about meeting personal needs of individuals.

9. Any suggestions for future events? Answers:

11. Change the name to a Family Fun Fest and include all people.
12. Have a senior adult event/ couples events/ widows support group.
13. Have a children's special needs day.
14. Have these events over the holiday when people are prone to more depression.
15. Minister to the Native Americans.
16. Put more directional signs up on the highway.
17. Have this event in the winter when there is no competition with other activities.

QUESTIONNAIRE (WITH SELECT ANSWERS) FOR THE ONE-PARENT FAMILY
FUN DAY EVENT FOR ONE-PARENT FAMILY PARTICIPANTS

1. Please indicate your gender? Male-(2) Female-(5)
2. Please indicate your marital status? Divorced-(2) Widowed-(3) Never married- (2) Other-(0)
3. Please indicate your age? 17-25-(1) 26-35-(2) 36-47-(4) 48-60(0) Other-(0)
4. Please indicate the number of children in your family? (1-4, 1 in college)
5. What do you hope your children will gain from the event? (Answers included understanding, friends, new relationships, loyalty, cooperation, love, respect, and authority.)
6. Have you made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ? Yes-(6) No-(1)
7. Are you an active member of another church? Yes-(3) No-(4)
8. Please give us your name, telephone number, and address so that we may contact you for another fun day activity (optional). (Two parents responded and subsequently we received all parents' addresses.)
9. How long have you been a one-parent family? 1-3 years-(3) 4-6 years-(2) more than 7 years-(2)
10. Have you previously participated in a one-parent family fun day?
Yes-(0) No- (7) Where? _____

When did you attend? _____
11. What do you expect to gain from this event? (Check one or as many that apply.)
A Closer Walk with God-(3) Social Acceptance-(4) Chance to Express Myself in a Safe Environment- (4) Future Development of a Support Group-(3) Gain Self Awareness-(4) Gain New Direction, Insight and Leadership-(2) Others (please list)
12. Is Saturday Morning a good time for this event? Yes-(6) No-(1)
If no, please suggest another time. (Winter preferred.)
13. Indicate if you would participate in a similar event again. Yes-(7) No-(0)
14. Would you invite another family to participate in a similar future event?
Yes-(7) No-(0)

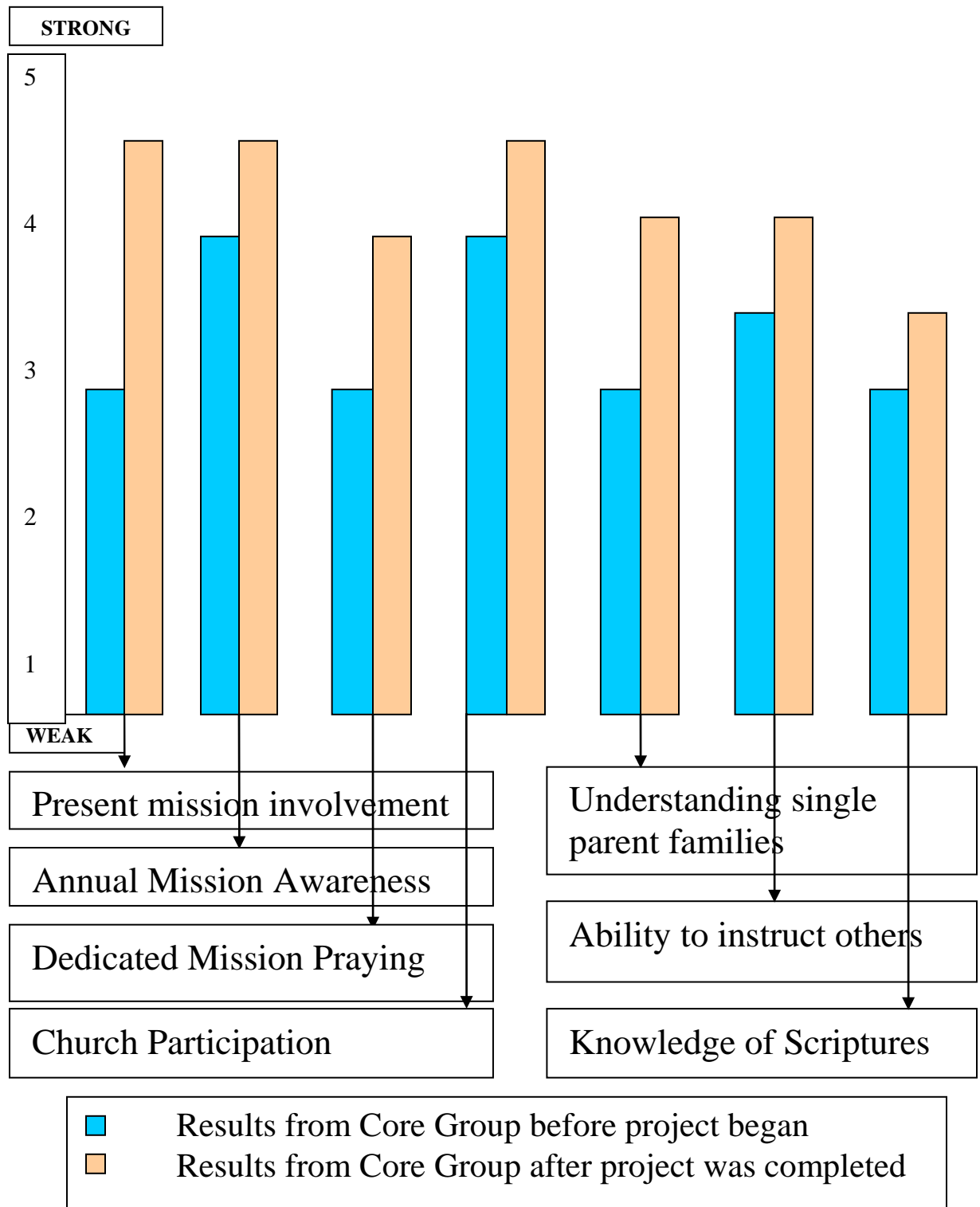
15. Was this facility adequate for your needs? Yes-(7) No-(0)
16. Please rate the event planning: (Check one) Well Planned-(4) Overly Planned-(2) Not Well Planned-(0) No thought at all to Planning-(1)
17. What would you have changed if you helped to plan the event? (Answers included: make Fun Day longer; add activities for adults like horseshoes, basketball, or crafts; have a longer break time.)
18. Did you experience genuine love and compassion from the seminar leaders?
Yes ☐ No ☐ (7 stated orally that they did not like one person more than any other, and they felt accepted by the volunteers.)
19. How often do you consult God for help in rearing your children and coping with life in general? (Check one) Once a Day-(1) More than once a Day-(5) Seldom-(1) Never-(0)
20. Did this event, including the seminars and other activities, help you in your overall mental or physical health? Yes-(6) No-(0) Did not Matter-(1)
21. Did the seminars give you the chance to express your feelings about being alone and coping with rearing your children? Yes ☐ No ☐ Somewhat ☐
22. Did these discussions help you adjust to loneliness, financial issues, religious issues, and social issues? Yes-(7) No-(0)
23. Please share anything you think would help us to better minister to one parent families in our area.

QUESTIONNAIRE (WITH SELECT ANSWERS) FOR THE ONE-PARENT FAMILY
FUN DAY EVENT FOR PARTICIPATING CHILDREN

1. Are you a Girl-(12) or a Boy-(1)?
2. What is your age? 1-3-(0) 4-8-(2) 9-12-(7) 13-17-(3)
3. Do you attend church anywhere? Yes-(10) No-(3)
4. Have you heard the story of Jesus before today? Yes-(11) No-(1)
5. Were you excited about coming to this fun day? Yes-(12) No-(1)
6. Have you ever been to a fun day event at a church? Yes-(10) No-(2)
7. What did you like most? (Check one or all that apply.)
Crafts-(4) Bible Story Time-(6) Games-(7) Refreshments-(2)
8. Would you like to come to another fun day? Yes-(12) No-(0) Maybe-(1)
9. Did you feel loved by the people at the fun day? Yes-(13) No-(0)
10. What would you like to do at the next fun day event? (Answers included:
nails and face painting, more games, swimming, water slide, be a helper,
teach a class for children.

(Assistance was provided children who needed help.)

APPENDIX 7
CHART RESULTS FROM TEAM QUESTIONNAIRES



WORKS CONSULTED

"A Generation at Risk." n.p. Accessed 10 October 2009. Online:
<http://www.rainbows.org/statistics.html>.

a Kempis, Thomas. *Invitation of Christ*. Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 1999.

Alexander, Neil M. "Deuteronomy." Pages 400-472 in *Numbers; Deuteronomy; Introduction to Narrative Literature: Joshua; Judges; Ruth; 1 & 2 Samuel*. Vol. 2 of NIB. Edited by Leander E. Keck. 12 vols. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1998.

Allen, Leslie C. *Psalm 101-150*. WBC 21. Waco, Tex.: Word Book, 1983.

Anthony, Michael J. and Carolyn A. Koons. *Single Adult Passages: Uncharted Territories*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991.

Armstrong, Brenda. "Helping the Single Parent Families Should Be Top Priority for Church." No pages cited. 28 March 2008. Online:
<http://www.thegoodsteward.com>.

Berkhof, Hendrikus. *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1979.

Bewer, Julius A. Hickley G. Mitchell, and John Merlin Powis Smith. *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Jonah*. ICC 28. New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1912.

Biddle, Mark E. *Deuteronomy*. Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary. Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2003.

Blenkinsopp, Joseph. *Isaiah 56-66*. AB. New York: Doubleday, 2003.

Bloesch, Donald G. *Life, Ministry, and Hope of Essentials of Evangelical Theology*. Vol. 2. New York: Harper & Row, 1978.

Brown, William. *Obadiah through Malachi*. Westminster Bible Companion. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996.

- Brueggemann, Walter. *Deuteronomy*. Abingdon Old Testament Commentary. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2001.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Isaiah 40-66*. Westminster Bible Companion. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998.
- Chance, J. Bradley. *Acts*. Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary. Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2007.
- Clements, Ronald E. "Deuteronomy." Pages 400-472 in *Numbers; Deuteronomy; Introduction to Narrative Literature: Joshua; Judges; Ruth; 1&2 Samuel*. Vol. 2 of NIB. Edited by Leander E. Keck. 12 vols. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1998.
- Clements, Ronald E. *Old Testament Theology: A Fresh Approach*. Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox, 1978.
- Cox, Harvey. *Religion in The Secular City: Towards A Postmodern Theology*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984.
- Cozelmann, Hans. *Acts of the Apostles*. Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1987.
- Crim, Keith. trans. *Theology of Psalms*. A Continental Commentary. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1992.
- Dodson, Dr. Fitzhugh. *How to Single Parent*. New York: Harper & Row, 1987.
- Dowd, Nancy E. *In Defence of Single-Parent Families*. New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- Edwards, Jonathan. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. 2 vols. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2005.
- "Facts About Single Parent Families." n.p. Accessed 20 November 2008. Online: www.parentswithoutpartners.org
- Frado, Dennis W. "Foreigners, Aliens: Church Diaconal Aid." Pages 327-330 in vol.2 of *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*. Edited by Erwin Fahlbusch, Lukas Vischer, Jan Milic Lochman, John Mbiti, and Jaroslav Pelikan. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001.
- Freedman, David Noel. ed. *ABD*. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- Fritz-Daiber, Karl. with Dennis W. Frado. "Foreigners, Aliens: Modern Problems and Issues." Pages 327-330 in vol.2 of *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*. Edited by Erwin Fahlbusch, Lukas Vischer, Jan Milic Lochman, John Mbiti, and Jaroslav Pelikan. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001.

- Hanson, Paul D. "Community: Old Testament." Pages 1099-1101 in vol. 1 of *ABD*. Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- Hensley, J. Clark. *Coping With Being Single Again*. Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1978.
- Hopkins, Fran. Single- Parent-Family Status from the 2000 U.S. Census, Online. <http://www.single-parent-families.com>.
- Johnson, Luke Timothy and Daniel J. Harrington. eds. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Sacra Pagina 5. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1992.
- Johnstone, Ronald L. *Religion and Society in Interaction: The Sociology of Religion*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1975.
- "Just the facts; a summary of recent information on America's children and their families." No pages. Cited 18 November 2008. Online: <http://www.Fathers.com/content/index.php?option=com-content&task=view&id=391>.
- Keck, Leander E., ed. Pages 110-111. "Acts, Introduction to Epistolary Literature, Romans & 1 Corinthians." Vol. 10 of *The New Interpreter's Bible: General Articles & Introduction, Commentary & Reflections For Each Book of the Bible Including The Apocryphal/ Deuterocanonical Books in Twelve Volumes*. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2002.
- Klassen, William. "NT and Early Jewish Literature." in vol. 4 of *ABD*. Edited by David Noel Freedman. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- Kraus, Hans-Joachim. *Psalms 60-150: A Continental Commentary*. Translated by Hulton C. Oswald. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1993.
- Kraus, Hans-Joachim. *Theology of Psalms: A Continental Commentary*. Translated by Keith Krim. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1993.
- Minirth, Frank. *Happiness Is a Lifestyle: Choosing to Make a Positive Change*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Revell, 2005.
- Schaff, Philip. *Anti-Nicene Christianity: From the Death of John the Apostle to Constantine the Great*. Vol. 2 of *History of the Christian Church*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006.
- Schaff, Philip. *Apostolic Christianity: From the Birth of Christ to the Death of St. John*. Vol. 1 of *History of the Christian Church*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006.
- Scott, Bernard Brandon. *Hear Then the Parables: A Commentary of the Parables of Jesus*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1990.

Smalley, Stephen S. *1, 2, and 3 John*. WBC 51. Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1984.

Stuart, Douglas. *Hosea-Jonah*. WBC 31. Waco, Tex.: Words Book, 1987.

U.S. Census Bureau, . "Halifax County, Virginia Fact Sheet." No pages. Cited 17 October 2009. Online:

http://www.factfinder.census.gov/servlet/SAFFacts?_event=Search&geo_id=&geoContext=&street=&county=halifax+county&cityTown=halifax+county&state=04000US51&zip=&lang=en&sse=on&pctxt=fph&pgsl=010&show_2003_tabs=&redirect=Y.

Walaskay, Paul W. *Acts*. Westminster Bible Companion. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998.

Wall, Roabert W. "The Book of Acts: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections." Page 111 in *Acts, Introduction to Epistolary Literature, Romans, & 1 Corinthians*. Vol. 10 of *NIB*. Edited by Leander Keck. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2002.

Wall, Robert W. "Community: New Testament Koinonia." in vol.1 of *ABD*. Edited by David Noel Freedman. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

Watts, John D. W. *Isaiah*. WBC 25. Waco, Tex.: Words Book, 2005.

Westermann, Claus. *Isaiah 40-66*. Translated by David M.G. Stalker.OTL. Philadelphia, Pa: Westminster, 1969.

Yates, Martha. *Coping: A Survival Manual for Women Alone*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976.